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MAY 2003

Tests

BIG FRIDGES
PESTICIDES IN TEA
TYRES
OVEN CLEANERS
PORTABLE COTS

CHOICE

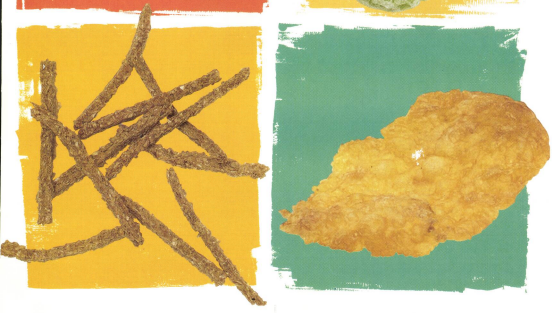
Independent information for smart consumers

HEALTHY CEREALS?

Not all of them

ETHANOL IN PETROL

Is it a problem?



SAVING FOR EDUCATION

The options explained

COMING SOON IN CHOICE

THE SOY DEBATE
STROLLERS
BAR FRIDGES
HEADPHONES
HAIR LOSS TREATMENTS

this month online

CHOICEextra

www.CHOICEextra.com.au: the free website exclusive to CHOICE personal subscribers. Look out for this symbol in magazine articles — it indicates there's extra info online.

Fridges
Find a model that suits your individual needs with our 'compare-a-product' fridge picker, plus a complete rundown of our fridge tests.

Tyres
Extra info on tyre maintenance and some tricky types of tyre to watch out for.

choice online

www.choice.com.au: CHOICE's public website, including content from *Computer* CHOICE, 'compare-a-product' features and news on consumer issues and our public campaigns.

In the market for a car?
Our new and used car price database is updated monthly to give you the upper hand when haggling in the showroom. It's at www.choice.com.au/cars.

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Jane Mackenzie, Editor

New website for CHOICE subscribers

Welcome to www.CHOICEextra.com.au — a website that's new this month, with exclusive free access for CHOICE magazine subscribers.

A common request from subscribers who go to our public website, CHOICE Online (www.choice.com.au), is for an index of topics in the magazine. On CHOICEextra you'll find an index that goes back four years, plus direct links to some of the articles in PDF format, to save you looking them up in your back copies. (You can download a PDF viewer free from the website if you don't have it already.)

In addition to this there's free access to some of our 'compare-a-product' features, which let you type in your individual requirements for a fridge or washing machine, say, and the website gives you a list of models that meets them. And there's extra information for some articles that didn't make it into the original CHOICE article, plus links to pages giving detailed information on your consumer rights.

If you currently have 12 months' free access to CHOICE Online as a CHOICE subscriber, this will continue until your 12 months are up, after which you'll be eligible for a discounted subscription for $7.50 per quarter (normally $13). This offer, as well as access to CHOICEextra, is only available to personal magazine subscribers, not institutions or companies.

CHOICEextra should be available from May 1, so type it into your computer (see right for how to log in) and start enjoying all the convenient free access it gives you to four years' worth of CHOICE articles, plus lots more.

Jane Mackenzie, Editor

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CHOICE Shopper is available to personal subscribers only.

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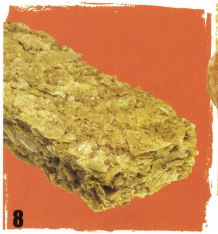

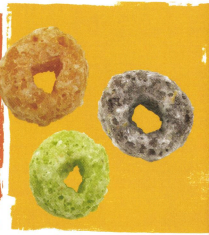

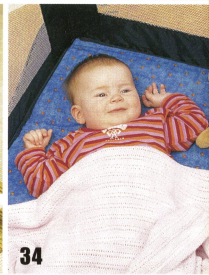

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ANTHONY SAUERS

ON SNACKS AND CHOCOLATE

The April issue of CHOICE *Health Reader* has lots of good news for food lovers who've restricted how much they eat of certain foods for health reasons.

For example, if you cut down on potato crisps, French fries and biscuits because of last year's health warning that these foods are high in acrylamide (a known carcinogen), you can relax. A new Swedish study found that acrylamide in food doesn't appear to influence cancer risk, although further studies are needed to confirm this. So it looks like one worry less with these types of snack — but they're still likely to be high in fat and/or salt or sugar, so enjoy them in moderation.

And last but not least, the 'positive health effects' of chocolate are put under the spotlight. The cocoa bean, which provides the base for chocolate, is high in antioxidants known as flavonoids, which can soak up free radicals. Dark chocolate has the highest flavonoid content and in small amounts adds to the pleasure of life. But don't imagine all that makes it kind to your arteries, points out *Health Reader*, and never forget that it's energy-dense and risks adding to your waistline.

The April issue of CHOICE *Health Reader* also reports that new legislation should make it easier to get cheaper generic prescription drugs and gives advice on how to beat jetlag.

If you'd like to subscribe to CHOICE *Health Reader*, see page 49, call 1800 069 552 or go to www.choice.com.au.

ACCC takes Pest Free to court

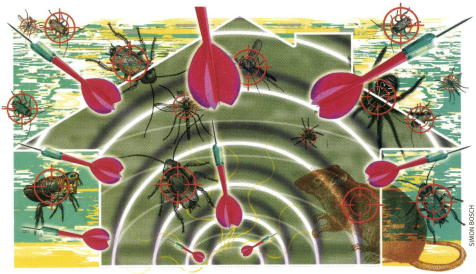
Late last year the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) began proceedings in the Federal Court against Pest Free Australia, alleging that it made false and misleading representations concerning the performance characteristics of the **PLUG IN PEST FREE** electronic device in various TV ads, newspaper advertisements, on its website and in various brochures and promotional material.

These claims included that, when the device was plugged into and using electricity from a normal power supply outlet within the buyer's premises, it would, among other things:

- Prevent the intake of water and nutrients by any noxious or destructive insects and vermin that inhabited premises near to the device.
- Cause the death by dehydration and/or starvation of these insects and vermin if they were unable to escape the effects of the device.
- Generate vibrations that repel such insects and vermin.
- Provide protection from noxious or destructive insects and vermin all day, every day, continuously into the future.
- Break the breeding and feeding cycles of cockroaches, mice, rats and other noxious or destructive insects or vermin.

The ACCC alleges that the representations are false and misleading and in breach of the Trade Practices Act because the device doesn't work as claimed. The ACCC is seeking court orders including declarations, corrective ads, injunctions, refunds to consumers and removal of the product from sale.

None of this is a surprise to us — we reported on electronic pest-repeller devices in CHOICE, May 2001, when we could find no scientific evidence to support claims that they can affect pests in ways like driving them away or deterring them from entering the treated area, and concluded that you shouldn't waste your money.



SIMON BOSCH

MEDICARE IS FOR EVERYONE

ANTHONY SAWERS

Medicare has always been a program for everyone. At its core is the promise that your health doesn't depend on your wealth — that everyone has an equal right to needed medical care, regardless of ability to pay.

Medicare's critics — and they, these days, include the Federal Government — claim it should concentrate on providing a safety net for the poor. Middle and high income earners, the critics say, should pay for at least part of their own healthcare through out-of-pocket expenses to see a GP, higher co-payments on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and through private health insurance.

CHOICE opposes measures to destroy universal access to bulk billing. The rich ought to pay more for public healthcare than the poor, but they do this already through the only fair process available — the tax system. If people pay their taxes, they ought to have full access to Medicare if they want it.

But something clearly needs to be done. Bulk-billing rates are in steep decline and in some places are virtually zero. The Consumers' Association and other like-minded organisations have proposed a program to breathe new life into Medicare.

- The rebate paid to doctors has fallen behind their costs and needs to be raised — but to nothing like the huge amounts demanded by the Australian Medical Association.
- We need more doctors. Bulk billing is in steepest decline where there's the least competition between practices. The government must train more GPs and attract doctors who've left the profession — such as women who've been raising families — back into practice.
- In crisis areas, state governments should set up bulk-billing clinics in which the state employs salaried doctors who bulk bill on Medicare.
- Schemes to help doctors employ support staff need to be much better funded and to have their red tape cut.

For more on CHOICE's work to keep Medicare accessible to all Australians, go to www.choice.com.au/health and click on 'check out our health campaigns'.

Appliance distributor can't meet warranty claims

Bad news if you bought a Bendix, Thor or Candy appliance last year: the distributor, Appliance International Australia (AIA), ceased trading at the end of last year, leaving customers without recourse for warranty claims.

AIA told us its major supplier in Italy "withdrew support" from these brands with virtually no notice. The company says it apologises unreservedly to anyone inconvenienced.

According to the administrator who had just been appointed when we made contact, the company can't meet warranty claims. If the situation changes an announcement will be made, but it's unlikely there'll be a better outcome for warranty claimants.

Customers are advised to direct spare parts and sales inquiries to BT Appliance Sales & Service in Sydney (phone (02) 9669 4377) or Dom Tech Appliances in Melbourne (phone (03) 9872 6850), which can send spare parts to other service centres outside these metropolitan areas.

From January 1, 2003, Dom Tech Appliances also started distributing these appliances (with normal warranty provisions); they're available in various shops in Melbourne. The company suggests customers in Melbourne who want to buy one of these brands contact it by email (sales.domtech@bigpond.com) or phone.

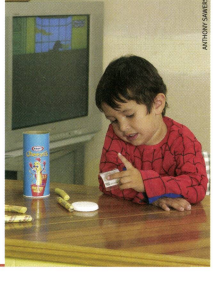
Disappointment for kids

Can you imagine little Billy's disappointment when the 'free toy' advertised on the Kraft Cheestik container turned out to be just a little sticker?

"It looks like a case of deceptive packaging," said his mum. "There's about an inch and a half of air space for the 'toy' and even a toy warning."

Disgruntled enough to phone Kraft, she was told the company had had lots of complaints, had planned to put a "real toy" inside and would do so in the future.

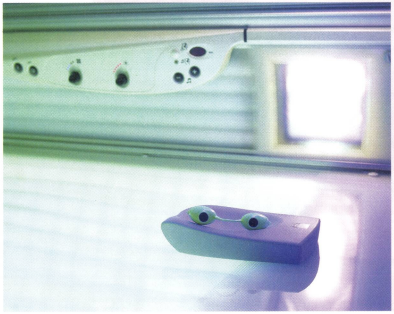
Sure enough, when we bought a container a couple of weeks later, it did contain a little toy, which we happily passed on to Billy. But you'd think a huge company like Kraft would treat its customer complaints with a little more goodwill, such as sending out a free packet of snacks, a shopping voucher, or at least a toy for the child who missed out — and an apology.


ANTHONY SAWERS

Maintaining the tan

With our long hot summers and love of the beach, using a solarium (sunbed) may not be as widespread and popular here as in northern European countries, but the risks associated with inappropriate use have nevertheless prompted the National Health Priority Action Council (NHPAC) to issue a warning to consumers. It's expressed concern about the potential for increases in skin cancers.

"There is evidence to suggest an association between cutaneous melanoma and exposure to sun lamps," it says, citing a recent Swedish study that found that for regular sunbed users, the melanoma risk increased by 20–170%.



ANTHONY SAMPERS

Since April last year, a new Australian standard on solaria for cosmetic purposes has been in place, with the aim of increasing the safety of consumers using sunbeds. However, it's only a voluntary code and compliance remains a problem.

So if you're using a commercial solarium, make sure the facility operates safely and adheres to the standard's requirements — the most important ones are listed below. And if you think it fails to do so, send an email to NHPAC@health.gov.au, which will follow it up with the relevant authorities.

The standard stipulates, among other things, that:

- Children under 15 aren't allowed to use a tanning unit; people aged 15–17 must have parental or guardian consent.
- Adults must sign and date a consent form before starting the first tanning session.
- A trained operator must supervise sunbed use at all times.
- Claims of non-cosmetic health benefits must not be made.

The standard also requires that notices must be displayed warning people that:

- Exposure to UV radiation such as from a tanning unit contributes to the skin aging process and may cause skin cancer.
- People with fair skin and who are unable to tan shouldn't use a tanning unit.
- People should avoid sunbathing or using a solarium for 48 hours after tanning exposure.
- Protective goggles must be worn while using a solarium.

UPDATE

WATER FILTERS

CHOICE, March 2003

In the March issue we reported on water filter models that have their filter performance certified according to accepted standards.

Unfortunately, we missed the **CLEARWATER** range of water filters (see the table), which are all certified to NSF 42 (covering aesthetic effects, such as chlorine), and all but the **CBT-10CTO** to NSF 53 (covering health effects, such as cryptosporidium and giardia, a range of organic chemicals, and heavy metals).

Note that a model doesn't have to comply with all the contaminants covered by a standard, but manufacturers can specify which of them they want to get certification for. So check the label. It should show exactly what reduction claims are certified.

Clearwater filters

Brand / model	Price ($)	Cost of replacement cartridge ($)*	Filter material
BENCHTOP SYSTEMS			
CBT-10CTO	169	45	Activated carbon block
DIAMOND RAIN CT5000	195	99	Activated carbon block
SINGLE-CARTRIDGE UNDER-BENCH SYSTEMS			
UNO CWUUNO	295	89	Activated carbon block
DUAL-CARTRIDGE UNDER-BENCH SYSTEMS			
TWIN CTU10PB1	395	109	Sediment filter, activated carbon block
DUO CWD-1PB	495	134	Sediment filter, activated carbon block

* *Set of two where applicable.*

yourletters

Financial planning help

Your piece on financial planners was much needed.

When I quit work four years ago I went to six different planners. Their advice differed only in detail and each told me at least one thing I later found to be wrong. Their set-up fees ranged from reasonable to astronomical for basically the same result.

What saved me from making any serious error was the Financial Information Service Officer at Centrelink. At its Parkside office in Adelaide is a wonderful woman — helpful, friendly, knowledgeable — who laid out all the various options. She knew what she was talking about and made no errors. She isn't a financial planner and was at pains to make this clear. However, after listening to her advice, I was able to make an informed decision.

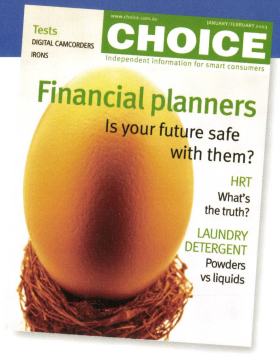
Centrelink gets some bad press but I'm grateful for this particular service and it deserves credit for it. I've been back a couple of times when my situation has changed and the advice has always been as good.

I finally ended up with a particular bank product because it wasn't too expensive, seemed as good as the others and I already banked there. Unfortunately that wasn't the end of the matter. The bank's planner then made a serious error that cost me over $9000. I went after the bank and eventually it reimbursed me. I doubt that it would have if I hadn't been very persistent!

Tony Rogers
Stirling, SA

It's good to know Centrelink can provide good, general, independent financial information at no cost, and you don't have to be a Centrelink client to see a Financial Information Services Officer.

The National Information Centre on Retirement Investments (NICRI) also provides consumers with general independent guidance on financial planning issues, and the Australian Securities and Investments Commissions (ASIC) has useful information on its website (www.fido.asic.gov.au). For more, including the results of our latest survey of financial planners, see CHOICE, Jan/Feb 2003.



THUMBS UP!

■ Michael Stomps of O'Connor, ACT, awards a thumbs up to **Gore-tex Garments**, which cheerfully replaced his 10-year-old waterproof top because it stands behind its 'keep you dry' guarantee.

■ Richard Thomas of Rowville, Victoria, awards a thumbs-up to **King of Knives** at Knox City shopping centre, which organised a replacement for an eight-year-old Wusthof carving knife (with a 10-year guarantee) even though he couldn't remember where the knife was purchased.

'Toying' with customers?

I went into Target and was enticed by big signs advertising '20% off toys'. After choosing a number of items for my six-month-old, I proceeded to the checkout.

There I noticed that a 'Curious Creature' toy came through at the normal price. I queried this and initially was told that the 20% off toys actually meant 20% off 'selected' toys. I pointed out that the only exceptions noted were console games and that there was a large 20% off sign hanging over the baby section.

But I was still told this didn't include 'baby toys'. After four minutes there were four Target staff discussing the matter and one store manager on the phone. After a further few minutes I was told the toy in question was not in fact a toy but a 'nursery accessory', even though the packaging stated, "This toy is sure to become a favourite companion at playtime, and quiet time, too."

I felt this was a little misleading and when I threatened to phone Consumer Affairs, Target gave me the 20% off. Less than $3, but it was the principle of the matter.

Ian Gorman
Via internet

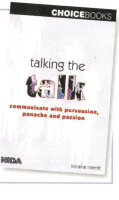
It always pays to be vigilant when taking advantage of sales. Make sure you get the discount you deserve. Since writing, Ian has taken his concerns to the Department of Consumer Affairs in his home state, which has asked Target to explain its actions. Target contacted Ian again, sending him a discount voucher and telling him it's now reviewed its product classifications.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

We want to hear from you — your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. Positive outcomes you've had to a complaint you took to a manufacturer, retailer, importer or tradesperson interest us too. Address these letters to *Thumbs Up* at the address on page 2.

To thank you for writing to us, *Your Letters* awards a prize of a CHOICE book to the 'Letter of the month'. This month's winner, Tony Rogers of Stirling, SA, receives *Talking the talk*, or any other book of his choice from Consumer Bookshelf, pages 40–42.

We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all your letters personally, and in the magazine we may edit them or print only an extract. See page 50 for how to reach us.



BREAKFAST CEREALS

Around 35% of the cereals we looked at came out looking good and 25% are OK, but the rest leave a lot to be desired.

IN A NUTSHELL

- **There are plenty of good** *cereals and muesli s to choose from — about 65 out of the 188 we checked are your best choice, and another 50-odd are OK. Sadly, though, the ones aimed at kids haven't improved — highly processed, sugar-laden, fibre-flimsy sums most of them up. See the tables on pages 10–12 for all our findings.*
- **We wouldn't recommend** *four of the 10 top-selling cereals for everyday eating (see right).*

Australians are big cereal eaters. Last year we munched our way through almost nine large (750 g) boxes each, and put ourselves out of pocket for it by almost $700 million. But how many of these cereals are nutritionally worth the money?

The tables on pages 10–12 give you the answer.

DO WE NEED BREAKFAST?

Breakfast is definitely a good idea. If you don't eat first thing, it's more likely you'll be hungry mid-morning. If you're out or at work, buying a healthy snack may be harder than having a healthy breakfast at home.

A number of studies suggest that children who skip breakfast tend to be fatter than those who don't. And there's some evidence that eating breakfast improves kids' learning ability.

For adults, skipping breakfast seems to be far less common among people who've successfully lost weight and kept it off long-term than for the average person.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT?

The best choice is something high in **carbohydrate** (our body's preferred source of fuel for the day),

Top sellers fall short

Only three of the top 10 selling cereals (for 2002) get our thumbs-up as a good breakfast. We wouldn't recommend four as your regular cereal choice, while the other three are OK but you can certainly find better choices.

Brand	Market share (%)	Our rating
SANITARIUM Weet-Bix	12.1	👍
KELLOGG'S Nutri-Grain	10.4	👎
KELLOGG'S Corn Flakes	6.9	👎
KELLOGG'S Coco Pops	5.8	👎
KELLOGG'S Just Right	5.8	OK
UNCLE TOBYS Flakes Plus	5.8	OK
KELLOGG'S Sultana Bran	4.6	👍
KELLOGG'S Special K	4.4	OK
KELLOGG'S Rice Bubbles	3.4	👎
UNCLE TOBYS Vita Brits	3.3	👍

Market share figures are from Retail World's Australasian Grocery Guide 2003.

PHOTOS: ANTHONY SAWERS

meaning that cereals have a head start. After that, a cereal high in **fibre** is a real bonus. As adults we're advised to eat about 30 grams of fibre a day, and most of us don't eat nearly enough. You should be able to rely on a breakfast cereal to deliver a decent whack of your daily fibre needs. That's why we weighted it most heavily when rating the cereals (see *Guide to the tables* on page 11).

What you don't want in a breakfast cereal is a lot of **fat** (which fortunately most don't have), **salt** or **sugar** (unless you're an athlete or very active, in which case sugar can provide some extra energy you need).

Most cereals have **vitamins** (mainly B_1, B_2, niacin and folate) and **minerals** (mainly iron) added to them. Breakfast cereals can be a significant source of these for children. For women, cereal can be a significant source of folate, which is important for women of child-bearing age because it can reduce the risk of giving birth to a baby with a neural tube defect such as spina bifida.

However, when choosing a cereal, make your shortlist based on high fibre and low fat, salt and sugar before you consider vitamins and minerals.

A number of cereals these days (mainly **LOWAN** and **VOGEL** brands) promote the fact that they're 'low GI'. While having a diet with a lower **glycaemic index** is probably good for us, we wouldn't recommend choosing your breakfast cereal purely on the merit of its GI — there are too many complications, such as what happens to the GI when you add milk and the fact that following the GI rules slavishly would knock out plenty of nutritious, high-fibre cereals. For more on GI, see CHOICE, Jan/Feb and March, 2003.

MORE ABOUT FIBRE

There are two types of fibre, known as soluble and insoluble. Insoluble fibre is the type we associate with preventing constipation and perhaps protecting against bowel cancer. A big plus of soluble fibre is its cholesterol-lowering effect, but because there's usually much more insoluble fibre in plant foods than soluble, it's hard to get enough to have this effect.

Some breakfast cereals can help, though — porridge, mueslis based on rolled oats and cereals based on oat bran all have a respectable amount of soluble fibre.

Some brands of cereal have their soluble fibre content listed in the nutrition panel so you can check how much you're getting. Of the cereals we looked at there's a handful that'll boost your soluble fibre intake significantly. **KELLOGG'S Guardian** contains 3.5 g in a serve (in the form of psyllium grain — a rich source), **UNCLE TOBYS Healthwise For Your Heart, UNCLE TOBYS Crunchy Oat Bran With Fruit** and **LOWAN Oat Bran & Fruit** all have 2 g and **FREEDOM FOODS Rice Flakes With Psyllium** has about 1.5 g.

Adding a couple of tablespoons of oat bran (or barley or rice bran) to your morning cereal could also get your soluble fibre intake off to a good start for the day.

NOT SO GOOD — FOR THE KIDS

The cereals aimed at kids, as well as the popular staples of rice bubbles/pops and cornflakes, don't fare too well.

Continued on page 13

Are you getting enough fibre?

Try our quiz to find out how much fibre you're eating. Adults should eat around 25-30 grams a day, while children need their age plus 5-10 grams. Adults and children alike should get their fibre from a variety of foods.

FIBRE QUIZ	HOW MUCH DO YOU EAT EVERY DAY? (grams)
Vegetables: 1 serve = $^1/_2$ cup cooked or one cup salad = 2 g fibre	
Fruit: 1 serve = 1 whole fruit, $^1/_2$ cup berries or diced fruit, $^1/_4$ cup dried fruit (fruit juice doesn't count) = 2.5 g fibre	
Beans, peas, lentils: 1 serve = $^1/_2$ cup cooked = 5 g fibre	
Nuts, seeds: 1 serve = $^1/_4$ cup, 1 tablespoon peanut butter = 3 g fibre	
Whole grains: 1 serve = 1 slice wholemeal or high-fibre bread, $^1/_2$ cup wholemeal or high-fibre pasta, brown rice = 2 g fibre	
Refined grains: 1 serve = 1 slice white bread, $^1/_2$ cup pasta or rice = 1 g fibre	
Breakfast cereals: 1 serve (see the table overleaf for the fibre content of your cereal. Figures there are shown as fibre per 100 g (%), so you'll need to calculate from that how much fibre per serve, which is shown in the first column of the table) = 7 g fibre	
TOTAL FIBRE EATEN EVERY DAY	

Breakfast cereals

1 & 2 Brand and serve size (g), in order of fibre content within groups	3 Fibre (%)	4 Energy (kJ per serve)	5 High fat	6 High sugar	7 High sodium
BISCUITS AND BITES					
High fibre					
SANITARIUM Hi Bran Weet-Bix (40)	18.5	580			
UNCLE TOBYS Shredded Wheat (25)	13.0	370			
UNCLE TOBYS Vita Brits (30)	13.0	390			
UNCLE TOBYS Vita Brits Organic (30)	13.0	390			
BLACK & GOLD Breakfast Wheat Biscuits (30)	12.0	410			
HOME BRAND Wheat Biscuits (30)	12.0	410			
NO FRILLS Wheat Biscuits (30)	12.0	410			
SANITARIUM Lite-Bix (30)	12.0	440			
KELLOGG'S Mini-Wheats Whole Wheat (30)	11.5	440			
SANITARIUM Weet-Bix Oat Bran (40)	11.5	590			
COLES Organic Wheat Biscuits (30)	11.0	420			
FARMLAND Wholewheat Biscuits (30)	11.0	440			
GOLDENVALE Wheat Biscuits (30)	11.0	440			
IGA Wheat Biscuits (30)	11.0	470			
SANITARIUM Weet-Bix (30)	11.0	440			
SANITARIUM Fruity Bix Fruit & Nut (45)	10.5	620			
Moderate fibre					
SANITARIUM Good Start (48)	9.5	760			
KELLOGG'S Mini-Wheats Apricot (30)	9.0	470			
KELLOGG'S Mini-Wheats Blackcurrant (30)	9.0	430			
SANITARIUM Fruity Bix Tropical (40)	9.0	580			
SANITARIUM Fruity Bix Wild Berry (40)	9.0	580			
SANITARIUM Fruity Bix Apricot (40)	8.5	580			
UNCLE TOBYS Fruity Bites Wild Berry (35)	8.0	530		✗ **(A)**	
BRAN					
Very high fibre					
UNCLE TOBYS Bran Plus (45)	45.5	550			
NO FRILLS Just Bran (30)	34.0	430		✗	
GOLDENVALE Just Bran (30)	33.5	420		✗	
NAYTURA Bran Cereal (10)	32.0	130			
LOWAN WHOLE FOODS Wheat, Rice, Oat & Soy MultiBran (50)	31.0	470			
VOGEL'S Ultra Bran Soy & Linseed (45)	31.0	590			
NU-VIT 4 Fibre Breakfast Cereal (40)	29.0	490			
KELLOGG'S All-Bran (45)	27.5	630			
High fibre					
KELLOGG'S All-Bran Fruit 'n' Oats (45)	19.5	640			
KELLOGG'S Bran Flakes (30)	17.5	430			
UNCLE TOBYS Sultanas 'n' Bran Plus (45)	14.5	670			
KELLOGG'S Sultana Bran (45)	14.0	640			
UNCLE TOBYS Crunchy Oat Bran with Fruit (45)	12.5	640			
LOWAN WHOLE FOODS Oat Bran & Fruit (50)	10.5	560			
Moderate fibre					
FARMLAND Bran Start (30)	6.0	400		✗✗	

1 & 2 Brand and serve size (g), in order of fibre content within groups	3 Fibre (%)	4 Energy (kJ per serve)	5 High fat	6 High sugar	7 High sodium
BUBBLES, FLAKES, PUFFS & OTHER STUFF					
Very high fibre					
KELLOGG'S Guardian (30)	21.0	430			
UNCLE TOBYS Healthwise for your Bowel & Digestive System (45)	20.5	590			
High fibre					
UNCLE TOBYS Fibre Plus (45)	14.5	660			
NORGANIC Crunchola Apple Blueberry (30)	14.0	390			
UNCLE TOBYS Healthwise for your Heart (45)	13.5	700			
UNCLE TOBYS Weeties (30)	13.0	390			
WEIGHT WATCHERS Fruit & Fibre (30)	13.0	460			
GOODNESS Apple Magic (45)	12.5	770		✗ **(A)**	
GOODNESS Banana Magic (45)	12.0	750		✗ **(A)**	
NATURE'S SOURCE Strawberry & Yoghurt (30)	11.5	470	✗		
WEIGHT WATCHERS Tropicana (30)	11.5	450			
GOODNESS Apricot Magic (45)	10.5	740		✗ **(A)**	
UNCLE TOBYS Weeties Fruit 'n' Nut (45)	10.5	620			
FARMLAND Sultana Crunch (50)	10.0	690			
GOLDENVALE Sultana Flakes (45)	10.0	660			
Moderate fibre					
UNCLE TOBYS Healthwise for Women 40+ (45)	9.5	640			
UNCLE TOBYS Lite Start Plus (45)	9.5	670			
UNCLE TOBYS Muesli Flakes Plus (45)	9.5	680			
UNCLE TOBYS Sports Plus (45)	9.5	680			
KELLOGG'S Just Right Fruit 'n' Flakes (40)	9.0	640			
PURINA Kornie Corn Flakes (30)	9.0	470			✗
FREEDOM FOODS Hi-Lite with Wholegrain Cereal (40)	8.5	500			
KELLOGG'S Just Right Original (45)	8.5	670			
LOWAN WHOLE FOODS MultiFlakes with Fruit & Nuts (45)	8.5	680			
NATURE'S SOURCE Lite 'n' Crispy (30)	8.5	410			
FARMLAND Special Lite Flakes (30)	8.0	480			
FREEDOM FOODS Rice Flakes with Psyllium (50)	8.0	750			
KELLOGG'S Just Right Just Grains (45)	8.0	700			
KELLOGG'S Oat 'n' Honey Bake (45)	8.0	840	✗		
UNCLE TOBYS Nut Feast (45)	8.0	690			
UNCLE TOBYS Oat Flakes (30)	7.5	500			
DICK SMITH'S Bush Foods Breakfast (30)	6.5	460			
GOLDENVALE Balanced Right (30)	6.5	470			
KELLOGG'S Sustain (45)	6.5	710			
SANITARIUM Light 'n' Tasty (30)	6.5	470			
SANITARIUM Puffed Wheat (25)	6.5	370			
DICK SMITH'S Maxi Grain (30)	6.0	450			
LOWAN WHOLE FOODS Gradual Energy Release Honey Toasted (50)	6.0	700			

1 & 2 Brand and serve size (g), in order of fibre content within groups	3 Fibre (%)	4 Energy (kJ per serve)	5 High fat	6 High sugar	7 High sodium
Low fibre					
BLACK & GOLD Corn Flakes (30)	4.0	480			✗
HOME BRAND Crunch Grain (30)	4.0	470		✗	
IGA Corn Flakes (30)	4.0	480			✗
KELLOGG'S Special K Red (30)	4.0	470			
FARMLAND Corn Flakes (30)	3.0	460			✗
GOLDENVALE Corn Flakes (30)	3.0	450			✗
KELLOGG'S Nutri-Grain Choc Malt (30)	3.0	480		✗	
NO FRILLS Crunchi Grain (30)	3.0	500		✗	
SANITARIUM Aussie Corn Flakes (30)	3.0	460			✗
GOOD MORNING Wholegrain Natural Rice Puffs (14)	2.5	220			
KELLOGG'S Corn Flakes (30)	2.5	470			✗✗
KELLOGG'S Crunchy Nut Cornflakes (30)	2.5	500		✗	
KELLOGG'S Nutri-Grain (30)	2.5	480		✗	✗
KELLOGG'S Special K (30)	2.5	470			
BLACK & GOLD Rice Pops (30)	2.0	490			
FARMLAND Rice Puffs (30)	2.0	470			✗
HOME BRAND Rice Pops (30)	2.0	470			✗
NEW DAY Breakfast Bubbles (30)	2.0	460			✗
NO FRILLS Rice Pops (30)	2.0	460			
SANITARIUM Bob the Builder Popped Rice (30)	2.0	470			✗
IGA Rice Crispies (30)	1.5	470			✗✗
KELLOGG'S Rice Bubbles (30)	1.0	480			✗
KELLOGG'S Crispix (30)	1.0	490			✗
KELLOGG'S Crispix Cocoa (30)	1.0	480		✗	✗
FOR KIDS					
Moderate fibre					
LOWAN WHOLE FOODS Oat and Wheat Honey O's (35)	6.0	470		✗✗	
SANITARIUM Honey Weets (30)	5.5	470			
Low fibre					
IGA Fruity Hoops (30)	4.5	500		✗✗	
KELLOGG'S Honey Smacks (30)	4.5	480		✗✗	
NEW DAY Fruity Rings (30)	4.5	500		✗✗	
ENVIROKIDZ Organic Koala Crisp (30)	3.5	440		✗	
KELLOGG'S Froot Loops (30)	2.5	490		✗✗	
KELLOGG'S Humungo Froot Loops (30)	2.5	500		✗✗	
LOWAN WHOLE FOODS Cocoa Bombs (35)	2.5	510			
IGA ActiveStart Coco Orbits (35)	2.0	530			
FARMLAND Cocoa Puffs (30)	1.5	490		✗	✗
KELLOGG'S Frosties (30)	1.5	480		✗✗	
NEW DAY Choco Rice (30)	1.5	500		✗	
NO FRILLS Cocoa Puffs (30)	1.5	490		✗	
KELLOGG'S Coco Pops (30)	1.0	480		✗	
FARMLAND Frooty Rings (30)	<1	490		✗	
HOME BRAND Fruiti Rings (30)	<1	490		✗✗	
NO FRILLS Fruit Flavoured Rings (30)	<1	480		✗✗	
HOME BRAND Cocoa Puffs (30)	0.5	440		✗✗	
KELLOGG'S Corn Pops (30)	0	480		✗	

1 & 2 Brand and serve size (g), in order of fibre content within groups	3 Fibre (%)	4 Energy (kJ per serve)	5 High fat	6 High sugar	7 High sodium
SOY					
Very high fibre					
VOGEL'S Soy & Linseed Soy-tana Bran Crunch with Sultanas (45)	20.0	710			
High fibre					
VOGEL'S Soytana with 20% Sultanas (45)	16.0	630			
LOWAN WHOLE FOODS Soy Flakes with Apricot & Almond (40)	11.0	530	✗		
Moderate fibre					
NORGANIC Soy Crunch (55)	7.5	880		✗	
LOWAN WHOLE FOODS Corn Wheat & Soy Multiflakes w. Tropical Fruit (45)	7.0	580			

Fibre is rounded to the nearest 0.5%, kilojoules to the nearest 10.

(A) *Fruit sugar contributes to the total.*

GUIDE TO THE TABLES

1 Brand

Our shoppers scoured the major supermarkets in Sydney to come up with about 190 ready-to-eat cereals, including muesli. Some of the brands may not be available in all states and territories.

2 Serve size

This is the serve size in grams suggested by the manufacturer. However, if you fill your bowl up regardless you may be eating more than this. As a rough guide:

- 30 g of bubbles or flakes is about a cup.
- 30 g of biscuits is two biscuits.
- 60 g of muesli is about half a cup.

3 Fibre

We rated the fibre levels as follows:

- Very high fibre: At least 20% fibre (6 g of fibre in a 30 g serve).
- High fibre: 10–19.9% fibre (3–5.9 g in a 30 g serve).
- Moderate fibre: 5–9.9% fibre (1.5–2.9 g in a 30 g serve).
- Low fibre: Less than 5% fibre.

4 Energy

We used the manufacturer's recommended serve size to calculate the energy in kilojoules that you'll get from your breakfast (not including the milk). Some muesli's don't have a suggested serve size; in this case we used a typical serve of 50 g. If you prefer to think in Calories, divide the kilojoules by 4.2.

5 High fat

✗: More than 9% fat (more than 2.7 g in a 30 g serve).

Muesli's have their fat content listed in the table overleaf rather than a rating as they're naturally higher in what's often reasonably healthy unsaturated fat. See *Muesli ain't muesli*, page 13, for more on this.

6 High sugar

✗: 27% to 40% sugar (two to three teaspoons in a 30 g serve).

✗✗: More than 40% sugar (more than three teaspoons in a 30 g serve).

The main types of sugar in breakfast cereals include sucrose (table sugar) and fructose (mainly found in fruit and fruit juice). Of the cereals that are high in sugar we've footnoted those where fruit sugar contributes to the total. Fruit sugar is much better because it brings fibre, vitamins and minerals with it.

7 High sodium

This is the part of salt (sodium chloride) you need to watch.

✗: 600–800 mg sodium per 100 g of cereal (which amounts to 20–27% of the lower recommended daily sodium intake for adults in a 30 g serve).

✗✗: More than 800 mg of sodium per 100 g.

Muesli

1 & 2 Brand and serve size (g), in order of fibre content	3 Fibre (%)	4 Energy (kJ per serve)	5 Fat (%)	6 High sugar	7 High sodium
High fibre					
FREEDOM FOODS Gluten Free, Wheat Free Muesli with Psyllium (40)	18.5	760	27.0 **(A)**		
GOODNESS Muesli Mixed Berry (60)	15.0	990	6.0		
HEALTHERIES Wheat and Gluten Free Muesli Apricot and Coconut (70)	15.0	1060	13.0		
GOODNESS Muesli Strawberry & Yoghurt (60)	14.0	970	5.5		
UNCLE TOBYS Natural Swiss Muesli (60)	13.5	890	6.0		
FARMLAND Muesli Apricot & Almond (50)	13.0	810	6.0		
GOODNESS Muesli Apricot & Almond (60)	12.5	980	7.0		
MORNING SUN Muesli Natural Apricot & Almond (60)	12.5	910	7.5		
HEALTHERIES Bircher Muesli Apple and Raisin (85)	12.0	1330	10.0		
HOME BRAND Muesli Tropical (50)	12.0	790	7.0		
MORNING SUN Muesli Natural Peach & Pecan (60)	12.0	910	7.5		
THE MUESLI COMPANY Toasted Muesli Full of Fruit (50)	12.0	820	9.0		
NATURE'S SOURCE Toasted Nut Crunch with Mixed Nuts (30)	11.5	450	11.0		
SUNSOL Breakfast Lite (40)	11.5	530	3.0	✗ **(B)**	
THE MUESLI COMPANY Premium Muesli Full of Fruit (50)	11.0	790	8.0		
CARMAN'S MUESLI Classic Fruit (45)	10.5	810	20.5		
NATURE'S SOURCE Luxury Swiss Breakfast Muesli (30)	10.5	420	7.0		
CARMAN'S MUESLI Natural (45)	10.0	780	10.0		
FREEDOM FOODS Yeast Free, Wheat Free Muesli with Wholegrains (40)	10.0	680	23.0 **(A)**		
MERIRAM Natural Muesli Low Fat (40)	10.0	540	2.5		
MORNING SUN Muesli Natural Date & Hazelnut (60)	10.0	910	8.5		
NAYTURA Premium Muesli Fruit and Nut Rich (60)	10.0	950	12.5		
NU-VIT Health Foods Mega High Protein Muesli (40)	10.0	610	11.0		
NU-VIT Health Foods Natural Muesli Low Fat (40)	10.0	540	2.5		
SANITARIUM Soy Delight Natural Muesli (65)	10.0	1040	12.0	✗ **(B)**	
SAVINGS Tropical Fruit Muesli (45)	10.0	710	8.0		
SUNSOL Natural Muesli Low Fat (40)	10.0	540	2.5		
SUNSOL Oven Baked Toasted Muesli (40)	10.0	670	14.0		
Moderate fibre					
ABUNDANT EARTH Gluten Free Muesli (50)	9.5	760	7.5		
GOODNESS Muesli Fruity Toasted (60)	9.0	1020	7.0	✗ **(B)**	
MERIRAM Natural Muesli (40)	9.0	640	13.0	✗ **(B)**	
MORNING SUN Muesli Toasted Tropical Fruits (60)	9.0	1060	14.0 **(A)**		
SUNSOL Deluxe Blend Muesli Linseed Soy (40)	9.0	650	13.5		
SUNSOL Natural Muesli (40)	9.0	640	13.5	✗ **(B)**	
FARMLAND Toasted Muesli (50)	8.5	940	13.5		
LOWAN WHOLE FOODS Australian Gold Muesli Tropical Fruits (50)	8.5	690	6.5		

1 / 2 Brand and serve size (g), in order of fibre content within groups	3 Fibre (%)	4 Energy (kJ per serve)	5 Fat (%)	6 High sugar	7 High sodium
LOWAN WHOLE FOODS Natural Muesli (50)	8.5	720	6.0		
NO FRILLS Muesli with Fruit (30)	8.5	430	7.0		
SUNSOL Natural Muesli Apricot & Almond (40)	8.5	630	12.0		
VOGEL'S Premium Oven Crisp Muesli (50)	8.5	890	15.5		
CARMAN'S MUESLI Original Recipe (45)	8.0	850	23.5		
LOWAN WHOLE FOODS Natural Muesli Walnut & Mango (50)	8.0	730	9.5		
PURINA Toasted Muesli (60)	8.0	1080	16.0		
SANITARIUM Lite Delight Baked Muesli (65)	8.0	1070	8.5		
SANITARIUM Natural Muesli Low Fat Delight (65)	8.0	880	2.0		
SUNSOL Corn Flake Muesli (40)	8.0	640	13.5		
SUNSOL Natural Muesli Fruity (40)	8.0	600	8.5	✗ **(B)**	
GOODNESS Muesli Original Toasted (ns)	7.5	910	13.5		
MELLOW YELLOW Fruity Muesli (55)	7.5	890	12.0	✗ **(B)**	
ALARA ORGANIC Organic Tropical Muesli (ns)	7.0	760	10.0		
KELLOGG'S Komplete Oven Baked Muesli (45)	7.0	730	6.5		
LOWAN WHOLE FOODS Natural Muesli Apricot & Almond (50)	7.0	740	13.5		
LOWAN WHOLE FOODS Natural Muesli Fruit & Nut (50)	7.0	740	9.0		
PURE HARVEST Organics Natural Muesli (100)	7.0	1480	5.0	✗ **(B)**	
SANITARIUM Macadamia Delight Tropical Muesli (65)	7.0	1020	10.0		
SUNSOL Vitality Soy Protein Muesli (40)	7.0	660	12.0		
MERIRAM Gluten Free Muesli (40)	6.5	630	7.0	✗ **(B)**	
SUNSOL Vitality Wildberry Muesli (40)	6.5	670	12.0		
ALARA ORGANIC Organic Rich Muesli (ns)	6.0	720	6.5		
ALARA ORGANIC Organic Gluten Free Muesli (ns)	5.0	830	13.0		
Low fibre					
BIOGENIC HEALTH FOODS Natural Muesli (25)	4.0	390	6.0		
NU-VIT Health Foods Gluten Free Muesli (40)	4.0	620	6.5	✗ **(B)**	
SUNSOL Gluten Free Muesli 97% Low Fat (40)	4.0	570	3.0	✗ **(B)**	

Fibre and fat are rounded to the nearest 0.5%, kilojoules to the nearest 10.

ns *Not stated.*

(A) *Almost half the fat is saturated.*

(B) *Fruit sugar contributes to the total.*

See page 12 for a guide to the tables.

From page 9

All the kids' cereals except one have too much sugar and/or too little fibre to be recommended for every day. The exception is **SANITARIUM Honey Weets**: a moderate source of fibre and not too high in sugar. It's worth giving this one a try if you're having no luck with wheat biscuits or porridge, for instance.

Kids need less fibre than adults because it can make a small stomach full before it's had a chance to get enough energy and other nutrients. Too much can also cause children to get stomach upsets and diarrhoea. The American Heart Foundation recommends the 'age + 5–10 grams' rule for kids. For example, a five-year-old should eat 10–15 g a day; a 16-year-old should have 21–26 g a day.

So while you don't need to try to convince your child to eat the kind of high-fibre cereal that's good for you, a cereal with a moderate amount of fibre is still better for them than little or none.

As for sugar, 10 out of the 20 kids' cereals have three or more teaspoons in a serve; another seven have two or more (see the table, page 11, for details).

About the best that can be said of most kids' cereals is that they're better than no breakfast at all, and the vitamins and minerals as well as calcium from the milk are a bonus.

Apart from cereals for kids, most brands of cornflakes and rice bubbles are low in fibre and high in salt — not the best choice as anyone's staple.

MUESLI AIN'T MUESLI

Muesli is intrinsically higher in fat than other ready-to-eat cereals, and often the fat is mainly the 'good' unsaturated type from the rolled oats, nuts and seeds. For this reason we haven't been as hard on muesli with a high fat content as we have for the other cereals. We've just listed the fat content and indicated when it's high in more undesirable saturated fat (see the table, left).

In the past toasted muesli tended to be higher in fat, but this time we found some lower-fat brands — largely when the oats are dry-roasted.

Here are a few tips for choosing a muesli:

- First check the fibre content; if it's high (more than 10%) it's good start.
- Next, check the fat content. If it's less than 10%, fine; if it's more, you need to work out what kind of fat it is. New regulations mean the saturated fat level has to be on the nutrition panel, and the ingredients list can also tell you whether the fat comes mainly from nuts and seeds — unsaturated fat — rather than from added fat. The higher up the ingredients list the nuts and seeds are (sometimes a percentage is given), the better.

BEST CHOICES

All up we counted 41 out of 125 cereals and 24 out of 63 mueslis that are your best choices — hopefully enough to satisfy everyone's taste.

- For everyday eating by most adults, the best choices are cereals and mueslis that are rated 'very high' or 'high' in fibre in the tables on pages 10–12, as well as not having too much fat, sugar or salt. Generally they're wheat biscuits, plain shredded wheat, bran-based cereals, some brands of muesli (see *Muesli ain't muesli* for more) and some of the 'combination' wholegrain cereals, including soy-based ones.
- Kids don't need as much fibre as adults, but still go for a cereal with a 'high' or 'moderate' amount and not much fat, sugar or salt. Of cereals specifically aimed at kids there's only one good choice: **SANITARIUM Honey Weets.**
- Although porridge (rolled oats) isn't included in the table (porridge is porridge) it's a good choice for both adults and kids.

Some of the mueslis list the added fat as 'vegetable fat'. This is probably from coconut oil, which is a saturated fat, or is 'hardened' vegetable oil, which can contain trans fat — as bad for us as saturated fat.

Muesli is much denser than most other cereals, so you'll be eating about double the weight and therefore double the kilojoules and fat per serve. (On the upside, you'll be getting double the fibre as well.) If you choose a muesli with more than around 10% fat you'd be best having a small serving.

WHAT ABOUT PORRIDGE?

Porridge is hard to go past for a good breakfast. A cup of cooked rolled oats gives you around 3–4 g of fibre (a decent amount of which is soluble fibre — see More about fibre, *page 9, for more on this), and the only sugar and salt is what you add.*

NOT A CHARACTERISING INGREDIENT?

As part of the trade-off for getting rid of some detailed standards for particular types of food, manufacturers are now supposed to label the percentage of 'characterising ingredients'. Part of the definition of characterising ingredients is that they would usually be "associated with the name of a food by the consumer". On this ground you'd think 'cereal' would be a characterising ingredient of breakfast cereals — but Goodman Fielder (which makes **UNCLE TOBYS**) doesn't interpret it this way. And that's hardly helpful when you're trying to compare between brands and types of cereal. A pat on the back for **KELLOGG'S** and **SANITARIUM** in this respect — all their labels list the percentage of cereal.

This problem isn't confined to breakfast cereals: we'll be looking further at manufacturers' creative interpretation of what constitutes a characterising ingredient in an upcoming article.

Bars, drinks and other alternatives

There's now a large range of breakfast bars to choose from. While none rivals the best choices of sit-down cereal, most are OK if breakfast on the run is the only option. They mostly provide a reasonable amount of fibre and have a similar kilojoule count to a 30 g serve of cereal (so you should be safe from the temptation of mid-morning snacking). However, they're mostly high in sugar, some of which is at least from fruit.

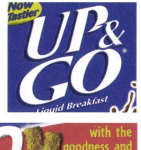
A number also have added calcium (the **UNCLE TOBYS** and **SANITARIUM** ranges) to make up for the calcium you're missing from adding milk to cereal — check the nutrition panel.

KELLOGG'S Pop-Tarts are different from breakfast bars: you pop them in the toaster. They're low in fibre and high in fat and sugar — just about all you don't want in a breakfast.

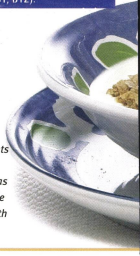
FANCY A DRINK?

The breakfast-in-a-drink market has taken off in the last year: the brands we found include **SO NATURAL FOODS Xpress, YOPLAIT B-fast, SANITARIUM Up & Go** and **SANITARIUM Fast Break.** They're a good source of fibre and calcium without being too high in fat or sugar, and provide a good boost of energy to start the day.

But don't think it's equivalent to eating a high-fibre breakfast cereal. The fibre in most breakfast cereal is mainly insoluble, whereas in breakfast drinks it's mainly soluble (from vegetable gums, inulin and resistant starch) — not as good as insoluble fibre in the bowel department (see *More on fibre*, page 9). It's a shame that none of the labels gave the percentage of insoluble to soluble fibre on the nutrition panel.



INGREDIENTS: FILTERED WATER, BREAKFAST CEREAL (FRUCTOSE, MAIZE STARCH, VEGETABLE GUM (ACACIA), CORN SYRUP SOLIDS), CANE SUGAR, SOY PROTEIN (NON-GENETICALLY MODIFIED), WHEAT MALTODEXTRIN, SUNFLOWER OIL, SKIM MILK POWDER, MINERALS (PHOSPHATES OF CALCIUM, POTASSIUM AND MAGNESIUM), COCOA (0.5%), FOOD ACID (332), FLAVOUR, VITAMINS (C, NIACIN, FOLATE, B2, B6, B1, B12).



The advertising compares Sanitarium Up & Go (above) with two Weet-bix (right), but that's wishful thinking: all you need to do is compare the two ingredients lists to see they're nothing alike (the only common ingredients are added vitamins and sugar). The fibre in the drink is largely resistant starch and soluble fibre (not as useful as insoluble for the bowels), and you won't get the valuable phytochemicals that you would from eating Weet-bix with '97% whole grain wheat'.

1 & 2 Brand and serve size (g), in order of fibre content	3 Fibre (%)	4 Energy (kJ per serve)	5 High fat	6 High sugar	7 High sodium
High fibre					
NORGANIC Crunchola Breakfast Bars Apricot (35)	15.0	600	✗		
NORGANIC Crunchola Breakfast Bars Apple Blueberry (35)	14.5	600	✗		
NORGANIC Crunchola Breakfast Bars Apple Cinnamon (35)	12.0	610	✗		
Moderate fibre					
HILLCREST Balanced Right Golden Flakes with Apricot (33)	7.0	520		✗ **(A)**	
HILLCREST Balanced Right Grains Delight (33)	7.0	520		✗ **(A)**	
UNCLE TOBYS Breakfast On the Go Apricot (37)	7.0	510		✗ **(A)**	
UNCLE TOBYS Breakfast On the Go Blueberry (37)	7.0	520			
HILLCREST Balanced Right Apricot (33)	6.5	520		✗ **(A)**	
KELLOGG'S Breakfast Bars Just Right (33)	6.0	510		✗ **(A)**	
SANITARIUM Fruity Bix Bars Apricot (25)	6.0	440	✗	✗	
SANITARIUM Fruity Bix Bars Strawberry (25)	6.0	440	✗	✗	
SANITARIUM Fruity Bix Bars Wild Berry (25)	6.0	440	✗	✗	
SANITARIUM Fruity Bix Bars Fruit & Nut (25)	5.0	420	✗	✗ **(A)**	
UNCLE TOBYS Breakfast On the Go Fruit & Nut (37)	5.0	550			
Low fibre					
LOWAN WHOLE FOODS Breakfast Bars Multiflakes with Fruit & Nuts (37)	4.5	530			
UNCLE TOBYS Breakfast On the Go Appleberry (37)	3.5	530			
UNCLE TOBYS Breakfast On the Go Honey & Nut (37)	3.5	550			
KELLOGG'S Breakfast Bars Crunchy Nut Cornflakes (33)	2.0	530		✗	

See page 12 for a guide to the table.

Fibre is rounded to the nearest 0.5%, kilojoules to the nearest 10.

(A) *Fruit sugar contributes to the total.*

INGREDIENTS: (IN DECREASING ORDER)
WHOLE GRAIN WHEAT (97%), RAW SUGAR, SALT, BARLEY MALT EXTRACT, VITAMINS (NIACIN, THIAMIN, RIBOFLAVIN, FOLATE), MINERAL (IRON).
NO ARTIFICIAL FLAVOURINGS OR COLOURINGS.
* RDI = Recommended Dietary Intake
** = 1 serve provides 25% of the folate RDI for women of childbearing age

Shopper's guide

First, Check the nutrition information panel; all foods have to have one. Use our ratings (see *Guide to tables*, page 12) to know how much sugar, fat or sodium is too much and how much fibre is enough.

Use the 'per 100 g' (%) amount listed on the label when evaluating the cereal and to compare products. The serve size is only a guide — it's the average serve, but may not be the amount you eat.

You can glean valuable information from reading the ingredients list. The shorter it is the better, because it means the cereal is closest to the original grain. It's useful for identifying sources of added fat (for example, the presence of palm or coconut oil tells you that the product's got saturated fat in it), sugars (such as honey, malt, glucose syrup) and salt. It can also tell you when the fat is the 'healthy' kind (as in nuts and seeds, often found in natural muesli) or when the sugar comes from fruit.

Look for a cereal that contains the words 'whole' or 'wholegrain' in the first ingredient. These cereals are less processed and contain more of the natural constituents found in the grain, including vitamins, minerals and phytochemicals (these may provide protection against some cancers and heart disease).

With only 44% cereal (and only flour and meal at that) there's not a true 'grain' in sight. It makes the name a bit of a joke.

IN A NUTSHELL

An important step *to securing the future of your children is to start saving as early as possible. A variety of investments are suitable for saving for children:*

- **Specific education savings plans** *designed to cover costs for years 11 and 12 and tertiary education.*
- **Tax-effective insurance and friendly society bonds.** *However, you need to hold them for 10 years to take advantage of their tax benefits.*
- **Managed funds** *are more flexible but they (as well as insurance bonds that invest in shares) are currently suffering from the downturn in the share market.*
- **Pay back your mortgage** *quickly, freeing up your money to cover the costs of education.*

All they need is love … and around $450,000 is the title of a recent report about the financial pressures on a family with two children.

Specifically, parents may find it hard to grasp the rising costs of education for their children. Figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) show costs for education are currently rising by around 5% annually, much faster than the inflation rate (around 3%). The worst cost increases affect younger children and toddlers: preschool and primary education costs went up by about 7% and childcare is rising by a staggering 17.6% a year.

To meet these and other costs, budgeting and saving are important. A variety of investments are suitable for saving for children:

- Education savings plans.
- Managed funds.
- Friendly society and insurance bonds.
- Paying back your mortgage quickly.

If you have a mortgage with a redraw facility, consider using it for your savings. This gives you a tax-free return of currently around 6.5%, which compares well with most other investment options. But you need to be very disciplined, stick to your savings plan and not use the money you've saved for other things.

EDUCATION SAVINGS PLANS

These are offered by two friendly societies:

- The Australian Scholarships Group.
- Australian Unity.

The savings plan by the **AUSTRALIAN SCHOLARSHIPS GROUP** (**ASG**) works more like an insurance policy than an investment, as the investment earnings only benefit children who go on to further education.

Put simply, **ASG** pools the money contributed (on average around $15 a week) and treats it as an interest-free loan, investing it in a balanced investment portfolio, which includes share investments.

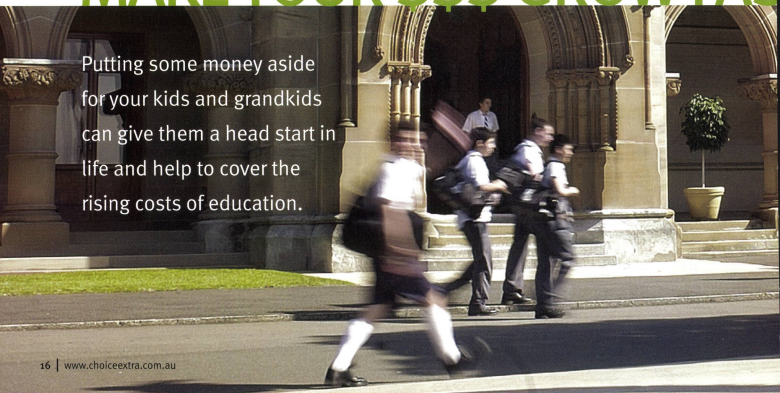
While around 80% of children enrolled in the secondary program do start Year 11/12, only 50% of children originally enrolled in the tertiary program go on to tertiary studies — and if your child isn't one of them you'll only get your contributions back, not any interest. So the children who continue with their education benefit from those who don't.

The maximum age to enrol a child in the secondary program is seven, and 10 for the tertiary program. There are also conditions: for example, only full-time and not part-time students receive benefits, and you only get part of your contributions back if you change your mind and want to leave the program early.

For more information contact **ASG** on (03) 9276 7777, or go to www.asg.com.au.

The **AUSTRALIAN UNITY** education savings plan is for parents, grandparents and sponsors (such as a godparent) saving for tertiary education. You can use a regular savings plan or contribute a lump sum. The minimum initial lump sum is $2500 for parents and grandparents, and $5000 for sponsors. The investment can be switched between three different investment

MAKE YOUR $$$ GROW FAS


Putting some money aside for your kids and grandkids can give them a head start in life and help to cover the rising costs of education.

portfolios (from 20% to 95% invested in shares).

Children must be enrolled in the plan before they turn 14. Once the student turns 18 they can start drawing against the accumulated investment to pay for the cost of tertiary education plus a limited amount for living expenses, up to a maximum of $10,000 per year.

At this point you can withdraw some or all of your contributions and just leave the earnings in the plan, or alternatively leave the total amount in the plan. If there's still money in the plan once the student has finished their education, you can either use the benefits for another child or simply withdraw any remaining benefits.

For more information contact **AUSTRALIAN UNITY** on 13 29 39 or go to www.australianunity.com.au.

Since January 1, 2003, the tax treatment of education savings plans offered by friendly societies has changed: the education benefits are distributed to the student tax-free, and depending on their marginal tax rate, they may then have to pay income tax on them (see *Hefty tax on kids*, page 18). Contributions are paid back on a tax-free basis.

MANAGED FUNDS

Managed funds are a flexible investment that can be used for long-term savings. You usually need to make an initial contribution of at least $1000, and many have a savings plan so that you can make monthly contributions.

You can choose between highly volatile share funds, balanced funds or lower-risk fixed-interest funds.

Unfortunately share funds especially have been badly hit by the downturn in the share market: see the table, below. For more information on managed funds generally, read *Take the puzzle out of investing* in CHOICE, Jan/Feb 2002.

Without having to formally set up a trust the fund manager may allow you to invest as a trustee for your child. This means the money belongs to the child when they turn 18 but you have control over the investment until then. However, check with your accountant or tax adviser before doing this as it might mean the investment is taxed at child rates; see *Hefty tax on kids*.

Investment returns (on average per year)

	To December 31, 2002 (%)			Projected over next 5 years (%)
	1 year	3 years	5 years	
Australian shares	–8.1	1.6	6.3	12.3
International shares	–26.9	–12.1	1.1	11.5
Listed property	12.0	15.0	11.3	5.1
Fixed interest	8.8	8.7	6.8	5.1
Cash	4.8	5.4	5.3	5.4

The above table, from ASSIRT (January 2003), assumes a slow but gradual recovery in global economies to be the most likely future scenario, though ASSIRT points out that there are significant risks — such as protracted war with Iraq, deflation and drought — that could have a negative effect on investment returns.

TERTIARY COSTS

Annual HECS fees currently are, for example:

- *$3680 for a degree in arts or nursing.*
- *$5424 for science, business or computing.*
- *$6136 for law and medicine.*

Paying fees upfront results in a 25% discount.

TER THAN YOUR KIDS

PHOTO: ANTHONY WAKERS

NEW GIFTING RULES TRAP PENSIONERS

Grandparents investing for their grandkids may be affected by 'gifting' rules. These apply once the investment is passed to the child, as it's considered a gift.

A single person or a couple receiving a pension or allowance can only make a gift of a maximum of $10,000 per financial year up to a total of $30,000 every five financial years. Amounts above this are considered 'deprived assets' and can affect your social security entitlements. For five years after the gift was made they're included in your assets and also added to the value of your other financial investments to calculate your deemed income.

For more information contact the Centrelink Financial Information Service on 13 23 00.

How much to save for secondary education

	ANNUAL COSTS ($)		MONTHLY CONTRIBUTIONS ($)	
	School fees	Other costs*	Start saving at birth	Start saving when child is 5
Top private school	12000	4000	423	631
Medium private school	6000	4000	265	394
Budget private school	1000	4000	133	197
Public school	500	2000	67	99

Source: *AMP.* * *Uniforms, books, extra tuition, excursions, sport, etc.*

Assumptions: *Inflation rate: 3%; investment return (after fees and tax): 5%. Contributions and costs are annually increased by the inflation rate. Child starts six years of secondary education at 12 years old.*

INSURANCE BONDS

Insurance bonds and friendly society bonds work like managed funds — the main difference is the tax treatment. All earnings are taxed at a maximum of 30% and you don't have to pay any further tax on them. This might suit families with both parents on a high marginal tax rate.

However, there are conditions on the tax advantages: you need to leave the investment in the bond for 10 years and you can only invest a maximum of 125% of the previous year's investment. For example, if you invest $100 each month this year, you can't invest more than $125 per month next year or the 10-year clock will start again.

Child advancement bonds are another type of insurance bond offered by a range of institutions. You can make the investment in the name of the child and specify an age at which they can take ownership of the funds — which could be any age between 16 and 25, say.

ACTION PLAN

If you want to save for your children, follow these steps:

- Set yourself a savings target: for example, estimate how much their secondary or tertiary education will cost, then work out how much time you have to save that amount.
- Decide which investment you want to use and in which name you want to invest — usually the name of the parent on the lower marginal tax rate. You could talk to a financial adviser about the options available and get tax advice from your accountant.
- Start a regular monthly savings plan. ■

HEFTY TAX ON KIDS

Children can generally earn only $643 a year in interest without paying tax.

- *If the interest is above $643 but below $1446, the amount above $643 is taxed at 66%.*
- *Once the interest reaches $1446 the entire amount (including the originally tax-free $643) is taxed at 47%.*

At an interest rate of 6% this means an investment of around $10,700 would be tax-free, but the interest on anything above this would be taxed at a high rate.

After the child turns 18 or if they work full-time for more than three months and don't study full-time, normal income tax rates apply.

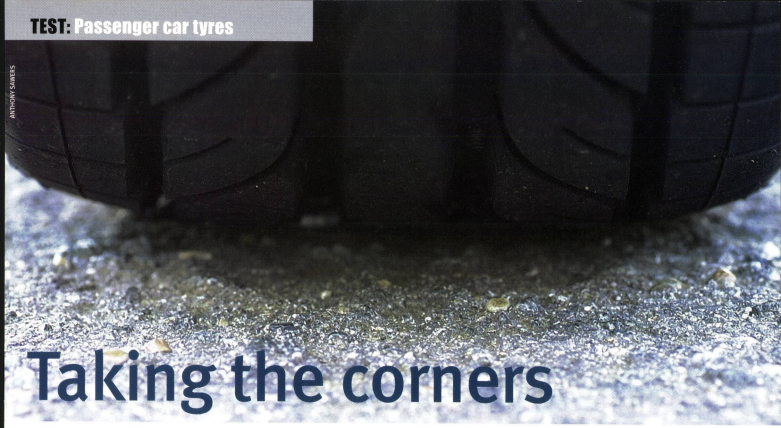
For more information contact the ATO on 13 28 61 or check www.ato.gov.au.

SOMETHING SAFE

Susan and her former partner Ken (not their real names) have agreed that Ken will pay $500 a month into an account to save for the tertiary education of their two children, Rosie (10) and Peter (12), instead of paying child maintenance. They're both happy with this arrangement.

Susan has calculated they'll need at least $50,000 to cover HECS fees: "They may decide just to do a three-year degree, but I've calculated a bit more to make sure they can afford to go for a four-year degree if they want to, and so will save some more money myself."

Susan isn't sure what the best investment is for her children and has made an appointment with a financial planner to discuss her options. However, she's certain the investment shouldn't be high-risk: "For something like their education I'd like a more conservative investment — even if that means a smaller return — so that at least it's safe," she says.



ANTHONY SAKRAS

Taking the corners

Performance in a high-speed cornering test showed up the biggest differences between models for small to medium-size cars.

This latest tyre test looked at a size suitable for small to medium car models such as the Ford Laser, Holden Astra, Mazda 323, Mitsubishi Lancer and Nissan Pulsar. (Last year — CHOICE, May 2002 — we reported on tyres for large family sedans.) We tested nine widely available mid-range models of 185/65R14 tyres (see *How to read a tyre*, page 20, for what the figures mean).

In addition, we conducted a test for our partner organisation in Hong Kong of models with a lower, sportier profile (185/60R14). This size is much more popular over there. Three of the Hong Kong models are available here as well, so we've reported on them in this article. Differences in performance between the two groups are due (among other things) to the different profiles.

If you're shopping for a new set of tyres, you don't have to stick with the model originally fitted to your car by the manufacturer. Just make sure you pick a tyre that meets your car's requirements for size and speed rating (check the owner's manual for details). Depending on your car, you may be able to fit either of the tested sizes on it.

GRIP vs DURABILITY

Each tyre design varies in its tread pattern and rubber mix, and is a compromise between a number of requirements, such as grip and durability. A soft tyre provides better grip but also leaves more rubber on the road, and won't last as long as a harder model. Racing tyres are an extreme example: they're very soft and almost glue the car to the track, but may only last for (part of) one race.

Our cornering, braking and emergency lane-change tests (see notes 2 and 3, page 21, for details) assess the tyres' grip, but not their durability. Tyre wear is expensive and difficult to test properly — for example, several European consumer organisations and motoring clubs carry out a joint test, part of which is a convoy drive over 10,000 kilometres, using identical cars. Unfortunately we can't join their test, because most European tyres are different from Australian ones. And we can't afford to run a similar test on our own.

CORNERING DIFFERENCES

We assessed both groups of tyres on the same scoring scale, and even the worst of the 60-profile models performed better overall than the best 65-profile model. We found the biggest performance differences in our cornering tests.

In dry conditions, the three 65-profile models in the *What to buy* list (page 20) kept our test car safely in the lane at 80 km/h. With all the other 65-profile models, the car drifted from the lane at this speed.

In wet conditions, the top five 65-profile models in

IN A NUTSHELL

- **Most tyres tested** *were 65-profile models, along with three 60-profile tyres. The 60-profile models performed better in all our tests, at least partly due their lower profile.*
- **Of the 65-profile** *models, the* ***FIRESTONE, KUMHO*** *and* ***CONTINENTAL*** *stood out in our high-speed cornering tests.*

THANK YOU

We'd like to thank:

- **Holden** for providing the test car.
- **Deighton Motors** in Warwick, Queensland, for valuable support throughout the project.
- **Morgan Park Raceway** in Warwick for their efforts to ensure a smooth test.

the table were able to handle 70 km/h, while the bottom four weren't.

The sportier 60-profile models were as good as or better than the 65-profile ones in these tests, with the **BRIDGESTONE** performing particularly well in wet conditions — it was the only tyre that kept the car inside the lane at 75 km/h.

There wasn't much between tyres within each group in the braking tests. However, the lower-profile models consistently stopped after a shorter distance than the 65-profile ones. And in an emergency situation, a couple of metres can mean the difference between avoiding an accident and not.

We measured the following average stopping distances to a complete standstill:

- From 50 km/h, around 9 m in dry conditions, and 10–11 m in the wet (except the **BRIDGESTONE**, which stopped as short as in the dry).
- From 80 km/h, the 65-profile models took about 26.5–28 m in the dry and 29–31 m in the wet.
- From 80 km/h, the 60-profile models took around 25 m in the dry and 28.5 m in the wet — again except the **BRIDGESTONE**, which required only about 27 m.

These results were certainly helped by the anti-lock braking system (ABS) fitted to our test car. In an emergency situation like that simulated by our tests, you just slam on the brakes and the electronics ensure the car stops as quickly as possible without locking the wheels.

When driving the same car without ABS, you'd have to adjust the force you applied to the brake pedal to prevent the wheels from locking up. This can be tricky, and it'd be much harder to achieve stopping distances as good as ours.

Also, our test driver knew he was going to have to brake — in an emergency, you won't. Half a second's reaction time at 50 km/h means an additional 7 m stopping distance; at 80 km/h it's an additional 11 m.

MORE INFO

Check CHOICE, May 2002, or go to www.CHOICEextra.com.au for information on:

- Tyre maintenance tips.
- Tricky tyre issues.

Firestone Firehawk TZ100 | *Kumho Powermax 769* | *Continental ContiEcoContact CP*

HOW TO READ A TYRE

Each tyre has standard markings that allow you to pick the right type for your car. It's a confusing mix of letters and numbers, of measurements in mm and inches. Here's what it all means, using the code for the tested size P185/65R14 H86:

- P — stands for passenger tyre.
- 185 — this is the maximum width (in mm) of the inflated tyre when it's not under load.
- 65 — this is a percentage describing the tyre's profile or aspect ratio. It's the ratio of the tyre's height from the wheel rim to the top of the tyre to its width — in this case 65%.
- R — stands for radial, which is the most common construction method for passenger car tyres.
- 14 — this refers to the diameter (in inches) of the rim the tyre should be fitted to.
- H — this is the speed rating and is code for the maximum speed (in km/h) the tyre can travel at (in this case 210 km/h).
- 86 is the load rating and is code for the maximum weight (in kg) one tyre can carry (in this case it means 530 kg).

WHAT TO BUY

185/65R14	
FIRESTONE Firehawk TZ100	$103
KUMHO Powermax 769	$97
CONTINENTAL ContiEcoContact CP	$123
185/60R14	
BRIDGESTONE Potenza GIII	$121
TOYO Trampio	$126
MICHELIN Certis	$140

All three of the 60-profile tyres tested that are available in Australia are good, safe tyres. However, there are other tyres with this profile available here that may be equally good but weren't in our test.

We tested the tyres in fairly extreme situations you'd normally only encounter in emergencies. In everyday driving conditions, all the tested models are likely to perform fine, and the differences between tyres are likely to be smaller than our scores indicate.

However, if you think emergency performance is what really counts, the all-round top performers were those listed on the left.

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

- The other models didn't keep the car inside the lane in the 80 km/h dry cornering test.
- The **GT**, **OLYMPIC**, **TOYO** and **YOKOHAMA** didn't keep the car inside the lane in the 70 km/h wet cornering test.

Dunlop Monza 200 | *Goodyear Eagle GA* | *Yokohama S760* | *Toyo Z Radial 600 – F4* | *Olympic Sprinter* | *GT Radial Champiro 65* | *Bridgestone Potenza GIII* | *Toyo Trampio* | *Michelin Certis*

Brand / model (in rank order within profile groups)	1 Overall score (%)	2 Cornering score (%)	3 Braking score (%)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price per tyre ($)*
SIZE 185/65R14						
FIRESTONE Firehawk TZ100	70	67	75	New Zealand	Bridgestone	103
KUMHO Powermax 769	70	67	75	Korea	Kumho	97
CONTINENTAL ContiEcoContact CP	68	67	70	France	Tyres 4 U	123
DUNLOP Monza 200	65	58	75	New Zealand	South Pacific Tyres	114
GOODYEAR Eagle GA	65	58	75	Australia **(A)**	South Pacific Tyres	110
YOKOHAMA S760	59	48	75	Philippines	Yokohama	106
TOYO Z Radial 600 – F4	58	47	75	Japan	Toyo Tyres & Rubber	124
OLYMPIC Sprinter	57	48	70	Australia **(A)**	South Pacific Tyres	111
GT Radial Champiro 65	53	42	70	Indonesia	Tyres 4 U	96
SIZE 185/60R14						
BRIDGESTONE Potenza GIII	84	83	85	Japan	Bridgestone	121
TOYO Trampio	77	75	80	Japan	Toyo Tyres & Rubber	126
MICHELIN Certis	74	70	80	Thailand	Michelin	140

* *Based on a phone survey in Sydney and Melbourne in March 2003, and including fitting and balancing. Shop around — we found big price differences for some models.*

(A) *According to the manufacturer, this model is now manufactured in New Zealand.*

1 Overall score

This is a combination of cornering (60%) and braking (40%).

2 Cornering score

We assessed how well the tyres managed to keep the car inside the lane at speeds of 75 km/h, 80 km/h and 85 km/h (dry conditions), and 65 km/h, 70 km/h and 75 km/h (wet conditions), using a right-hand corner with about a 40 m radius.

3 Braking score

We measured the stopping distance to a complete standstill in emergency braking tests from 50 km/h and 80 km/h, in both dry and wet conditions.

Note: We carried out two other tests, but didn't find any discernible differences between tyres, so didn't score these tests:

- A standard **emergency lane change** (swerve from the left into the right lane and back again) at 80 km/h in wet conditions. All the models handled the manoeuvre comfortably.
- **Rolling noise** measurements at the driver's left ear at 30 km/h and 80 km/h. There was a difference of only 2 dB between the models (you wouldn't be able to hear that difference), and the engine noise was higher than the rolling noise at both speeds.

MICHAEL LOHL

Corner or crash: at a given speed, a better tyre may well keep your car inside the lane (far left), whereas a poorer one may cause your car to drift into the other lane or off the road (left).

Choosing a DUVET

Winter's just around the corner. Time to update your old duvet? Here's the lowdown on all the different types.

IN A NUTSHELL

- **For maximum warmth** *and softness, you can't beat a 100% down duvet, but it's comparatively expensive to buy.*
- **Synthetic duvets are** *relatively cheap and easy-care, but don't offer other benefits of natural fills.*
- **The popularity of wool** *duvets is on the rise — pure or mixed with other natural fibres.*

When choosing a duvet, deciding on the fill can be difficult. Will you invest in a high-quality — and comparatively expensive — down duvet or a cheaper feather and down one? How easy is a wool duvet to look after? What benefits will a good-quality synthetic one give you?

In this article we'll give you the pros and cons of the different types of fill to make the choice easier. But if you want a duvet for yourself (rather than the guest room, where it'll only be used occasionally), take the time to think about your needs, as your choice of fill can make all the difference. For example:

- If you hate heavy bedding but want maximum warmth, a 100% down duvet fits the bill. But if you want one for all year round, a different fill might be better, or a dual-layer duvet, where you use one layer in summer and both layers, held together by press-studs, in winter.
- If you want to snuggle up on the sofa under your duvet on cold winter nights, a down, down/feather or good-quality synthetic duvet will wrap around you more easily than any other fill. (Wool and some lower-quality synthetics have springier fibres and so are a bit snuggle-proof.)
- A wool or polyester duvet looks smooth and crisp, even if you've sat or lain on it, whereas a down duvet needs some fluffing up.

Duvet prices vary from shop to shop, so it's worth shopping around. If you're planning ahead, consider buying a warm duvet at the end of winter or a lighter one at the end of summer, when prices are often greatly reduced.

SOFT DOWN AND FEATHERS

Both goose and duck down and feathers are used in duvets in Australia. They're by-products of birds bred for their meat, primarily in China, where duck meat is eaten as commonly as chicken in Australia. The large

demand for duck meat there is one of the reasons duck down and feathers are a little cheaper than those of geese.

Down is the soft, fluffy plumage that grows underneath the birds' outer breast feathers to protect them from the cold. Each down cluster contains thousands of filaments that intertwine with each other, forming air pockets that provide natural insulation to keep cold out and warmth in.

In terms of quality, goose down has slightly bigger clusters (though not as big as the goose down you'd find in Europe, which originates from a different, eastern European goose species) and gives better loft (ability to hold air) and so more warmth (see page 25 for more on this).

Good-quality duvets contain only new down and feathers and are labelled 'all new materials'. If a duvet contains recycled product, it must be labelled 'couché' (French for slept) or 'recycled'.

Quality and warmth

Spending more doesn't automatically get you a better product with all purchases, but with a down duvet you're likely to get a better-quality product with higher-quality down (bigger clusters) for better loft and warmth. Smaller, lower-grade (and cheaper) down is flatter and will eventually lose its ability to spring open when you fluff and air it.

If you're looking for a soft, light and warm duvet, choose one with a high down content. The more down, the warmer and lighter the duvet, but also the more expensive. However, down will last longer than feathers, which have hollow, tubular quills that'll break down over time.

When we researched prices and availability of duvets in mid February, specialist bedding shops, department and variety stores stocked 100% down duvets as well as combination down and feather ones (ranging from 50–90% down). Queen-size duvets were priced from around $300–$500 for 100% goose down to around $200–$250 for a 50/50 duvet, which at the end of the summer season we often saw reduced to around $100.

If you want the softness and lightness of 100% down but less warmth in a warmer climate, look for less fill or cassette-style stitching (see page 25), both of which reduce the warmth factor.

In the past, a down/feather duvet's warmth factor was often indicated on the packaging as 'total fill weight' or 'fill power' (the amount of loft and the size of the down cluster). However, manufacturers are increasingly moving towards simpler warmth descriptions on the packaging, such as 'lightweight (or two-loft) for summer' or 'maximum warmth (or four-loft) for the coolest nights'. However, the total fill weight may still be mentioned on the product itself.

Care

A down or down/feather duvet generally needs little care, just regular airing and daily fluffing up. If it gets dirty, follow the manufacturer's instructions, which should be on the duvet.

If it's machine-washable, it's best to take it to a laundromat unless you have a very large washing machine and tumble dryer. Make sure all the detergent residue is rinsed out thoroughly so the down clusters won't stick together.

Some manufacturers say their duvets shouldn't be tumble-dried, while others say they should, on low to medium. Depending on size, it may need three or four hours. To help fluff up the filling, put a clean pair of sneakers or tennis balls in the tumble dryer at the same time. Finally, air it for a few hours afterwards to help remove residual moisture and fluff up the down.

Duvets and allergies

Dust mites are microscopic and thrive in warm and humid environments such as bedding. Their droppings are the most common cause of dust-related allergies. We asked duvet manufacturers about their products' suitability for people with asthma or allergies.

Wool duvet manufacturers claimed wool doesn't attract dust mites, whereas synthetic fibres don't 'breathe' and can trap moisture which, when the duvet isn't washed regularly, can create ideal conditions for dust mites. However, a maker of synthetic fibre for duvets emphasised that polyester duvets can be washed regularly, which is most important in reducing dust mites in bedding.

Some good-quality wool and polyester duvets are also treated with antimicrobial and antibacterial chemicals to minimise allergic reactions to dust mites (the chemicals are claimed to interfere with the mites' feeding process) and mould and mildew, and some polyester duvets contain antimicrobial fibres.

Even a major down and feather duvet manufacturer dismissed our questions as to its products' potential to trigger allergic reactions as a "misconception", pointing to a recent New Zealand study that found 6–15 times more dust mites in samples of synthetic pillows and duvets than in feather ones.

According to the study, the problem seemed to have been caused by the duvets' casings rather than the fill. The feather duvets' casings were much more tightly woven than those of the synthetic duvets in the study, which the dust mites could penetrate more easily.

Other overseas studies concluded similarly that dust mites can't penetrate good-quality, finely woven duvet casings.

Asthma Australia (the association of all Asthma Foundations throughout Australia) doesn't recommend one type of duvet over another. It recommends people with asthma use bedding that can be washed frequently and tumble-dried on high, such as a cotton blanket. But if you prefer a duvet, its advice is to cover it with a dust mite-proof cover made from materials impenetrable to dust mites — your chemist or Asthma Foundation can advise on brands.

HE'S HOT, SHE'S COLD?

Some manufacturers make duvets or blankets for couples with different warmth requirements, where the two sides are made of different materials (such as cotton and wool) or contain fills with different weight and warmth factors.

In the shop

- Take the duvet and shake it for, say, 20 seconds. Then feel whether the soft, lofty down springs up again or you can just feel the casing with a thin layer of fill or, even worse, just the casing because the down's moved elsewhere, which could create hot and cold spots during the night.
- The cover should feel soft but be tightly woven so the fill won't escape and feathers won't poke through.
- A good-quality duvet should have lots of information on the packaging.

WARM WOOL

The popularity of woollen duvets is steadily on the rise. "It's amazing how things have changed," one manufacturer of wool duvets remarked. "At first it was just a winter line, now it's an all-year thing."

Just like down and feathers, the natural insulation properties of wool make it a convenient fill for duvets. Wool can absorb up to 30% of its own weight in moisture without feeling damp, so you won't feel clammy with sweat.

Quality and warmth

Wool fibres are stiffer and springier than down and feathers, so a wool duvet has less loft and won't snuggle as closely around your body. It's also heavier than a down duvet. But the natural corkscrew-like crimp of good-quality wool will bounce back to keep its loft after you sit or lie on it. And the crimped fibres trap air in tiny pockets for even warmth distribution.

In the past, the warmth of a wool duvet was often described as equivalent to, say, two, three or four blankets. But manufacturers are increasingly moving away from such descriptions because different types of blanket (wool, cotton or synthetic) offer varying levels of warmth, which usually decrease as the blanket gets older.

Instead you'll find terms such as 'summer loft' (lightweight), 'high loft' (medium warmth) or 'super loft' (real winter weight), or the weight of the filling per square metre, such as 400 g/m² for all year round, 500 g/m² winter weight or 250 g/m² for summer.

Pricewise, wool duvets fall roughly between synthetic and down/feather ones. In Sydney stores we found queen-size wool duvets from $100 to $300, depending on warmth and quality.

For an extra $50 or $70 on top of the top price for a wool duvet, you can get one with 5% cashmere added for extra lightness, softness and warmth. And if you really feel the cold on freezing nights — and expense isn't an issue — you can indulge in a light and warm alpaca duvet, available online for $795 queen-size.

Care

Just like down, a wool duvet requires little care, apart from fluffing up and regular airing, perhaps when you change the sheets. If necessary, have it dry-cleaned and air it for at least 24 hours afterwards. To spot-clean stains, sponge the affected area, keeping moisture to a minimum.

Some wool duvets can also be washed, but it's important to follow the manufacturer's recommendations. Wash it in a very large washing machine (one manufacturer advises against using a top-loading machine with an agitator) on a gentle wool cycle with a designated wool detergent. After a short, gentle spin, air-dry it in a well ventilated area. Take care when you take it out of the machine, as wet wool can get pretty heavy. Don't tumble-dry or wring it.

In the shop

- If the duvet contains Australian wool, it should be stated on the packaging. But it can still be *made* elsewhere, unless it's labelled Australian-made.
- The Woolmark is an international licensing program that guarantees the duvet's fibre content meets wool quality specifications and claims such as 'pure new wool', 'machine-washable', 'may be tumble-dried' and so on.

PRACTICAL SYNTHETIC

Duvets made of synthetic fibres don't have the benefits of those with natural fillings — the fibres don't 'breathe' and won't absorb sweat to leave you warm and dry. But they're a popular choice in Australia, especially for people who are sensitive to natural fillings, need to wash their duvet frequently, or want a light one for summer or even all year round. They're generally fully machine-washable and quick to dry.

Quality and warmth

In our small shop survey, we saw queen-size polyester duvets for as little as $25. Whether you'd be happy sleeping under one of the very cheap ones, though, is another question. Their fill and casing were of much lower quality than those that cost a bit more.

At the upper price level (around the $100 mark), you'll find duvets made from better-quality polyester fibres such as those developed and made by DuPont (Dacron, Hollofil or Quallofil). These fibres are

In a twin-layer duvet, two light layers (of wool, in this instance) create a thermal pocket and so keep you warmer than one heavier single layer.

promoted for their superior washability, durability, softness and ability to bounce back. The quality and performance of duvets bearing these trademarks are guaranteed by DuPont.

Duvets with the antimicrobial fibre Allerban are particularly promoted for people with allergies — for more on this, see *Duvets and allergies*, page 23.

The fill weight of polyester is, like wool, generally specified in grams per square metre (though the weights of the two fillings aren't comparable), such as 250–350 g/m² for a summer weight or all-year-round duvet, or dual layers of 175 or 200 g/m² each for extra warmth in winter.

Microfibre is a specially light and fine polyester fibre that's air-blown into the duvet casing for good loft and softness. It's designed to emulate the characteristics and feel of down. Microfibre duvets are generally a little more expensive than those made of other types of polyester. The ones we saw in Sydney sold for around $120–$160 for a queen-size.

Care

A polyester duvet is usually fully washable but shouldn't be dry-cleaned or tumble-dried in a household dryer. In a large, commercial machine, however, the tumble-drying process can assist the refluffing of the filling. Check the manufacturer's instructions.

If you're hand-washing a big duvet in the bathtub, squeeze as much moisture out as possible before you lift it out. Otherwise the fill could tear away from the stitching when it's heavy with water.

How well a synthetic duvet survives frequent washing depends largely on the quality of the cover, stitching and fibres it contains. Some duvets specifically labelled for allergy sufferers have tightly woven outer casings and contain fibres claimed to be suitable for frequent washing, even at relatively high temperatures.

Our sister organisations in New Zealand, the US and Germany have tested synthetic duvets in the past and found they can lose some loft in the wash or the filling ends up lumpy and bunched up. Washing in too small a washing machine can contribute to these problems, so check the recommendations and use a bigger machine in a laundromat, if necessary.

In the shop

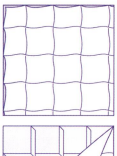
- Feel the duvet to get an idea of its loft, how well it bounces back and the softness of the fill and cover.

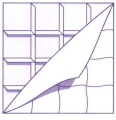
COOL COTTON

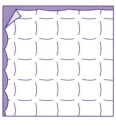
Duvets filled with 100% cotton are more popular in the warmer regions of Australia. They're generally labelled for summer conditions and are an alternative to a light cotton blanket, if you want to keep co-ordinating your sheets and duvet covers over summer.

Cotton duvets aren't as lofty as other types, but can be washed at higher temperatures and are promoted as particularly suitable for children or people with allergies. In our small store survey we found queen-size cotton duvets from $90–$150, and one costing a little more (on special) that contained a mixture of cotton and wool. ■

A down cluster has thousands of intertwining filaments, forming pockets of air that'll keep you warm.







SLEEPMASTER

THE JARGON EXPLAINED

- **Doona** is a trademark of Pacific Dunlop (Tontine), but in Australia it's commonly used to refer to a duvet or quilt.
- **Loft** refers to the height of the duvet's fill and its ability to hold air, which will keep you warm. Down has high loft, wool has less and cotton the least.
- **Cassette/box stitch style:** Individual squares are sewn through the fill to keep it in place. The stitching helps soften wool and synthetic fills so the duvet wraps around you more easily. This style also keeps down and feather fills evenly distributed, but it won't adapt perfectly to your body shape when wrapped around you because it restricts the loft — the filling can only rise as high the space between the stitching allows (see top left).
- **Baffled cassette/box stitch style:** For maximum loft and warmth, down and feather duvets often have little walls of fabric (baffles), about 2.5 cm high, hand-sewn inside the duvet in a square pattern between the top and bottom layers of the casing, which allows the fill to rise as high as the fabric walls (see centre left). You can also get styles with partially open baffled walls or channels.
- **Karo stitch style:** Similar to the cassette/box stitch style, but the squares are left open in the corners so you can shift the fill as required (see bottom left).
- **Channelled style:** The filling is held in long channelled strips sewn along the duvet, which allows you to shake feather and/or down filling up or down the channels to regulate warmth according to the season. This design is becoming less popular, as the filling can create uncomfortable hot or cold spots.
- **Four-way adjustable style:** Similar to the channelled style, but you can adjust the filling four ways, not just up and down. It's promoted for bed partners with differing temperature needs.
- **Japara** is a fabric often used for the casing of down and feather duvets. It's high-quality cotton woven tightly so the fill won't escape.

A SAMPLES UK HAVENSTEIN

Buying a monitor

A good-quality monitor doesn't have to cost a fortune — but it's worthwhile doing your homework.

TIP

Try to view a monitor *in action before buying it. Look at a page of green or black text (7-point Times New Roman) on a white background, checking to see whether the edges and centre are bright and clear. Using green text will help you notice problems with focus or sharpness better. Open a picture file to check colours look natural and, if possible, view the same images on two different monitors side-by-side for comparison.*

TIP

If you're buying an LCD *screen (see right), watch out for broken pixels. Once a monitor is assembled, pixels can't be fixed individually — you'll need an entirely new display. Check your warranty to see whether you're covered if pixels fail and what number of dead pixels is needed before you're eligible for a replacement.*

There's no shortage of monitors available and if you choose carefully, the one you buy could outlast your computer. Use this guide to help you make the right decisions when buying a new monitor.

CRT OR LCD?

Two types of monitor are available for home computers — cathode ray tube (CRT) and liquid crystal display (LCD). LCDs used to be much more expensive than CRTs, but prices are falling, especially for 15 inch screens, and if one suits your needs it might be worth considering.

CRT monitors are still the most common displays. They're heavier and bulkier than LCDs, but cheaper — especially if you're looking for a larger-sized screen. A good-quality, mid-priced 17 inch CRT monitor can cost around $400. In terms of picture quality compared with LCDs, CRT monitors have a wider range of colours and better detail at lower resolution (see right). You may notice some offputting flicker and glare, however.

LCD screens are mostly found with notebook computers, but their compact size makes them an attractive desktop option. They produce clear, sharp images without the annoying flicker of CRTs, but have limitations when it comes to colour range, contrast and detail. If you do a lot of graphics editing, you're probably better off with a CRT monitor that provides clearer detail. A 15 inch LCD monitor will cost around $600 or more, while 17 inch screens start at around $1000. Shop around, though — it's often possible to find models cheaper than their recommended retail price.

HOW TO CHOOSE

It's important to buy a monitor with simple controls and useful features, but more than anything, you want a screen that displays images well. Check the following points before buying.

Size: Keep in mind that the advertised overall size of a CRT includes the casing and surround and, typically, they're as deep as they are wide. The monitor screen is measured diagonally in inches and the viewable area — the image you see — is about an inch smaller than what's advertised. A 17 inch CRT monitor measured from corner to corner, for example, will have a 16 inch viewable image across its screen and occupy just under a quarter of a square metre of desk space. An LCD, on the other hand, is only a few centimetres deep and has the same viewable image as the advertised monitor size.

Refresh rates: The number of times the screen image is redrawn each second is referred to as the refresh rate or frequency. To avoid flicker, CRTs require a high refresh rate — above 60 Hz, preferably 75 Hz or higher. Most monitors allow you to adjust this, but check what rate your computer's graphics card can handle first. Refresh rates aren't an issue with LCDs.

Resolution: CRT and LCD monitors differ slightly when it comes to resolution — the number of picture elements (or pixels) that make up an image. CRTs, for example, have a maximum resolution, but can support lower resolutions (that is, show fewer pixels) without necessarily lowering picture quality. The ability to change resolution can be useful, especially if you play games, for example. LCDs, on the other hand, really support only one resolution and can have picture-quality problems running at lower resolutions. For a 17 inch CRT monitor, 1024 x 768 should suit most people; for a 17 inch LCD, images look best at 1280 x 1024.

Computer CHOICE tested CRT monitors in Nov/Dec 2002. If you'd like to subscribe, call 1800 069 552.

ETHANOL IN PETROL — *should you care?*

Depending on where you live, you may be utterly confused by this issue, or not have a clue what it's all about. Here's the lowdown.

Are you worried about damaging your car's engine by filling up with ethanol-blended petrol? Or confused because your local station has suddenly started displaying signs saying no ethanol is used in its petrol — and you have no idea what that's about? You're not alone.

WHAT *IS* IT ALL ABOUT, THEN?

Ethanol is an alcohol — in fact, it's *the* alcohol, the one that makes drinking and driving such a bad idea.

But it's also used for other purposes, such as an additive to petrol. In Brazil, for example, most cars have been modified to run on a blend of about 22% ethanol and 78% petrol. Some even use straight ethanol.

But petrol blended with similar ethanol concentrations has also been available in Australia — and used in cars that aren't modified for this purpose — for more than a decade, albeit only at a relatively small number of petrol stations (at about 200 sites in Sydney and Wollongong, for example).

In September 2002 the government introduced legislation designed to increase the amount of locally produced ethanol used as a fuel:

- Ethanol used as a fuel is taxed at the same rate as petrol (about 38 ¢/L), affecting both domestically produced and imported ethanol.
- But, initially for one year, domestically produced ethanol is being subsidised by 38 ¢/L, in effect exempting Australian ethanol from the tax.

Ethanol produced in Australia costs about 55–75 ¢/L. The government subsidy protects it from imported ethanol (which is cheaper without the tax, but much more expensive with), and also makes it cheaper per litre than petrol.

The government's objective is to increase the amount of ethanol blended with petrol sevenfold by 2010 compared to current levels. Why?

- One of the main declared reasons is to support **regional development** and the farming industries that supply the raw materials for ethanol production — mainly wheat starch and molasses from sugar cane.
- Ethanol is also said to have some **environmental benefits** over petrol (see *What about the environment?*, page 29, for details).
- It would somewhat **decrease our dependency** on the finite resource petroleum.

However, there's been a heated debate between government and ethanol producers on the one side, and car manufacturers and motoring organisations on the other, about what levels of ethanol in petrol are safe for car engines.

Most car manufacturers say petrol containing more than 10% ethanol can damage car engines, and their new car warranties won't cover such damage.

The Australian Biofuels Association (ABA) claims

IN A NUTSHELL

- **The Federal Government** *has introduced legislation aimed at increasing the amount of Australian-made ethanol that's used as fuel. However, its failure to keep consumers properly informed has greatly damaged the program before it's even got off the ground.*
- **There are doubts,** *and further research is under way, about what level of ethanol in petrol is safe for car engines.*

STOP PRESS

Literally hours before we went to press, the Federal Government announced that the ethanol content in petrol will be capped at 10%, and service stations will have to disclose ethanol levels at the bowser.

BP ETHANOL TRIAL

BP conducted an ethanol trial in Brisbane, selling a clearly labelled 10% blend at six sites from May 2002 to February 2003. The ethanol was produced from sugar molasses.

According to BP, the trial was successful and no engine or other problems were reported. However, the trial was discontinued, partly because of the confusion about ethanol at the time.

there hasn't been any damage to cars since the introduction of 20% ethanol blends in the Sydney/Wollongong area. And the government says a literature study on the effects of 20% ethanol blends has been inconclusive, and more research is needed before a maximum ethanol concentration can be included in the national fuel-quality standard.

However, some states already have their own restrictions: Queensland indirectly (by limiting petrol volatility) doesn't allow blends with more than 10% ethanol, while South Australia doesn't allow ethanol in petrol at all.

While further research may be required to pinpoint exactly at what level ethanol does become damaging for what type of car engine, it can't be ruled out that more than 10% ethanol is already problematic.

So the logical consequence, in CHOICE's view, would have been for the government to err on the safe side and introduce, in accordance with the recommendations of car manufacturers, a temporary 10% limit until further research results are available. Or at the very least it should have ensured that consumers are able to make an informed choice by ordering petrol stations that sell blended petrol to label the level of ethanol content at the bowser.

However, neither has happened so far, causing a great deal of confusion among motorists, and damaging the reputation of ethanol-blended petrol in general.

Finally, as we write this, the Federal Government has decided to introduce mandatory labelling in the near future, after unsuccessfully asking the states to require labelling at the bowser under fair trading law.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Environment Australia, the government's environment department, has been monitoring the level of ethanol in petrol. It found ethanol in about 9% of samples. The real proportion is likely to be lower, because the program takes a combination of random samples and samples following up complaints from motorists.

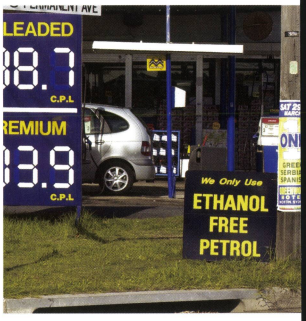
The majority of blended samples contained 10% or more ethanol, and most of those were found in NSW.

Until they're proven safe, how can you avoid these high blends and the risk of voiding your car's warranty?

- The vast majority of ethanol-blended petrol is used at about 200 independent stations in the Sydney/Wollongong area, supplied by Manildra Park Petroleum (which is owned by ethanol producer Manildra). According to the ABA, most of them used to label the level of ethanol in the petrol they sold. However, since other stations started to display 'No ethanol' signs, most of them stopped labelling the ethanol content.

Where does that leave you?

- If you want to avoid high ethanol blends, fill up



where you know what you're getting. For example, BP, Caltex, Mobil, Shell and Woolworths have published statements claiming they don't use ethanol at any of their branded sites. Other petrol stations may display 'No ethanol' signs, or tell you the percentage of ethanol they're using. This advice is of course also true if you want to avoid ethanol altogether at the moment.

- However, remember that blends with up to 10% ethanol are considered safe for most cars (see *How can ethanol affect your car?*, below). Queensland indirectly limits blends to 10% ethanol; Caltex sells blends with up to 10% ethanol in about 40 Bogas-branded sites in NSW. And even in all other areas except the Sydney/Wollongong region, you're very unlikely to run into blends with more than 10% ethanol.

HOW CAN ETHANOL AFFECT YOUR CAR?

Theoretically, there's a number of ways ethanol-blended petrol can affect a car — some are general problems, others only at relatively high ethanol concentrations.

Car operation

Ethanol affects several characteristics of petrol, such as its octane rating, octane sensitivity, oxygen content and volatility, and therefore a car's engine performance and drivability.

Potentially, ethanol-blended petrol could cause problems such as engine knock for certain (mainly older) engine types or under certain driving conditions. The study of the available scientific literature carried out by Environment Australia found that the evidence is inconclusive. The government has started its own test program, with results not expected until 2004.

Fuel system durability

Petrol blended with relatively high concentrations of ethanol (above 10%) may cause corrosion of the fuel system, damage plastic and rubber parts and dissolve existing deposits, which may lead to blockages of the fuel line or fuel filter. These effects are more likely to be found in older cars.

Fuel consumption

As ethanol contains only about 68% of the energy of petrol, a 10% blend is likely to increase fuel consumption by about 2–3%.

So where does that all lead?

It's widely agreed that most car engines run without problems or needing modification on blends with up to 10% ethanol.

It's also widely agreed that blends in excess of 20% ethanol (such as those used in Brazil) require older car engines in particular to be modified in order to avoid damage or drivability problems.

The disagreement seems to be about exactly the concentration at which problems are likely to start for different engine types. While the government concluded that further research is required, car manufacturers say their new car warranties may not cover damage caused by blends with more than 10% ethanol.

WHAT ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT?

Ethanol-blended petrol has advantages and disadvantages for the environment over normal petrol — the extent of most of them depends on factors such as the percentage of the blend, the engine type and how the ethanol was produced:

- A 10% blend generally reduces the car's emissions of carbon monoxide (CO), hydrocarbons (HC), some carcinogens such as benzene and toluene and — in some circumstances — the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide (CO_2). However, due to the government subsidy, any reduction of CO_2 emissions comes at a very high price compared to other initiatives.
- Ethanol increases the petrol's volatility, and therefore the amount of evaporative emissions of volatile organic compounds, which can contribute to global warming and the formation of ground-level ozone (summer smog). This can be avoided by changing the volatility of the petrol used for blending.
- There are higher emissions of carcinogenic aldehydes (such as formaldehyde and acetaldehyde) and — in most cases — of oxides of nitrogen (NOx).
- Overall, there seems to be little benefit for urban air quality or greenhouse gas emissions resulting from the use of ethanol-blended petrol. However, as ethanol is produced from agricultural products or waste, it's a renewable energy source.

SO IS IT ALL WORTH IT?

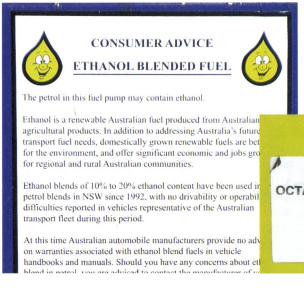
The government subsidy for domestically produced ethanol is currently limited to one year, while long-term strategies are considered.

The introduction of the subsidy to start with seems surprising, as there are recent government studies that question whether it's the most cost-effective tool to achieve the government's goals. In fact, the Treasury's 2002 Fuel Tax Inquiry Report concluded that tax concessions for petrol substitutes are "likely to result in a misallocation of resources".

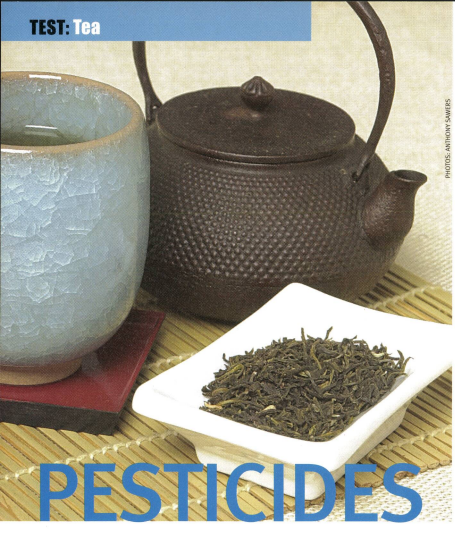
- **Environmental benefits**: Overall, these are at best marginal. Greater improvements are likely to be achieved by developments in engine technology (lower fuel consumption), fuel quality (for example, lower benzene and sulphur concentrations) and changes to car buying habits (smaller cars with lower fuel consumption) and driving behaviour (less car use, better driving techniques, more public transport). So resources may be much more efficiently spent supporting these types of development.
- **Fuel security**: Ethanol will only replace a very small fraction of Australia's petrol consumption — even after the envisaged sevenfold increase in fuel-ethanol by 2010.

And the production of ethanol from agricultural sources is subject to its own risk, as it relies on the weather. So its impact on fuel security is fairly small, and the subsidy money may be better spent on reducing our petrol needs.

- **Regional development**: According to a government study, ethanol production is unlikely to become commercially viable, but rather to rely on continued significant government support. The ABA disagrees. However, the question is again whether the subsidy money could achieve better results in this area when spent in a different way. ■


CONSUMER ADVICE
ETHANOL BLENDED FUEL
The petrol in this fuel pump may contain ethanol.
Ethanol is a renewable Australian fuel produced from Australian
agricultural products. In addition to addressing Australia's future
transport fuel needs, domestically grown renewable fuels are bet
for the environment, and offer significant economic and jobs gro
for regional and rural Australian communities.
Ethanol blends of 10% to 20% ethanol content have been used i
petrol blends in NSW since 1992, with no drivability or operabil
difficulties reported in vehicles representative of the Australian
transport fleet during this period.
At this time Australian automobile manufacturers provide no adv
on warranties associated with ethanol blend fuels in vehicle
handbooks and manuals. Should you have any concerns about et
blend in petrol, you are advised to contact the manufacturer of
OCTANE ENHANCED FUEL
WITH
ETHANOL

CHOICE thinks it should be mandatory for petrol stations that sell blended petrol to label, at the bowser, the level of ethanol.



PHOTOS: ANTHONY SAMUELS

PESTICIDES in your cuppa?

There were traces of pesticides in nearly 40% of the brands we tested — should you worry?

IN A NUTSHELL

- **We found pesticide residues** *in 21 samples of tea — seven out of 17 green teas, eight out of 20 black teas and six out of 18 herbal infusions.*
- **Expert opinion is that** *even the teas with the most pesticides should still be safe to drink. That said, why drink brands that have residues when you don't have to?*
- **Based on our tests,** *black tea probably won't contribute much to your overall pesticide intake. But you may need to be more discerning when choosing a green tea or herbal infusion. Use our table, page 32, as a guide.*

Never thought about pesticides in your daily cuppa? Neither had we until our German counterparts ran tests and found pesticide residues in a large number of teas. So we set about testing the teas available in Australia: black, green and herbal infusions.

We tested 55 widely available brands, all except one in teabag form, for over 100 pesticides. We tested the dry product, not brewed.

With herbal infusions, we specifically looked for brands with rosehip in them because the German results found a lot of them to contain pentachlorophenol (PCP) — thought to be present as a result of contamination of rosehip during drying in ovens used for drying wood as well, or by laying rosehips on wooden racks for drying (PCP is a timber preservative).

We also looked at herbal infusions that contained citrus fruit or peel because the German results found some of them to contain thiabendazole, a fungicide commonly used on citrus fruit.

For a full list of the brands tested and which pesticides were found, see the table on page 32.

WHY ARE PESTICIDES USED?

A multitude of pests attack tea, most commonly mites, leaf-eating beetles and caterpillars. Weeds are a problem as well, and herbicides are used to kill them.

The patterns of pesticide use are different from one tea-producing country to another because they have different pest problems. The fact that we found multiple residues in a number of samples may be due to the fact that most teas are a highly blended product, meaning that tea from numerous producers may be in a single sample.

THE RESULTS

We found residues in 21 samples — seven out of 17 green teas, eight out of 20 black teas and six out of 18 herbal infusions. Happily, all the teas that claim to be organic got the all-clear.

We only found PCP in one of the herbal infusions (**TWININGS Cranberry, Raspberry & Elderflower**), in contrast to the Germans finding it in numerous products. And we didn't find thiabendazole in any of the fruit infusions.

Some pesticides have a maximum residue limit (MRL), which is the amount of a pesticide that's legally allowed in a food. It isn't a safety limit but rather a limit generally based on tests that show what residue will be left when the pesticide is used as intended (in other words, following good agricultural practice). Many MRLs were set years ago when there was less evidence of risk from low-level exposure.

Seven of the brands contained one pesticide (cypermethrin) above the maximum residue limit for tea, with three products (the **FORMOSAN** green and black teas and **RED SEAL Green Tea**) having more than 20 times the MRL.

Twelve products contained other pesticides for which there are MRLs for tea in the Food Standards Code (these include ethion, fenitrothion, endosulfan and dicofol), but all were below the MRL.

BREACHING THE CODE

What about the other 17 pesticides we found for which no MRLs are set in the Food Standards Code?

The absence of an MRL has the same effect as an MRL of zero: any detectable residue is unacceptable under the code. These teas are in breach of the code

and manufacturers could be prosecuted by state and territory health authorities.

Mostly, the absence of an MRL doesn't mean the pesticide has been banned in this country, just that it's not used in Australia on tea grown here and so no producer or manufacturer has applied to have it registered. Given that many teas are fully imported, this seems to be a big hole in regulation.

SAFE TO DRINK?

Our food regulator (FSANZ) conducted a dietary exposure assessment for us using the residue levels our tests found for each pesticide. This works out the amount of residue you'd be likely to consume each day from drinking tea. It concluded that in all cases, dietary exposure is well below the acceptable daily intake (ADI) for each of the residues, and that all the teas are therefore safe to drink.

The acceptable daily intake of a chemical is the daily amount which, during a lifetime, appears to be able to be consumed without appreciable risk, on the basis of all the facts known at the time. It's arrived at by evaluation of toxicological data (usually gathered from tests on animals, in particular rats; there are very limited human studies) and the addition of a safety factor to account for the unknown.

However, ADIs aren't foolproof. There are several reasons why available toxicity data may not accurately reflect the hazard potential of the chemical to humans, even taking the safety factors used into account. These include the facts that:

- Humans don't necessarily react in the same way as rats and other lab animals used for testing.
- Different individuals have different susceptibilities to toxins.
- Children and the developing foetus are particularly susceptible to toxins.
- In lab studies the test animal is exposed to only a single pesticide. Humans can be exposed to multiple pesticides simultaneously, which may lead to additive or synergistic effects.
- Not all types of toxicity are studied in detail. Hormone-disrupting chemicals are a classic example of a group of chemicals that's known to be problematic, but pesticides that are currently registered haven't been tested for their hormone-disrupting abilities.

So regardless of what the 'official' risk is, it's up to you to decide, but we'd suggest using the 'less is better' principle, bearing in mind you don't just get pesticide residues from tea. Based on our test results, any brand of black tea (except perhaps **FORMOSAN**) is probably OK — levels and numbers of pesticide residues found were low. Choosing a green tea or herbal infusion might be a bit trickier — use our table as a guide.

Tea and herbal confusion

Tea comes from a tea bush — the botanical name is *Camellia sinensis* — but different processes are used to make black and green tea.

- **Green tea** is lightly withered (dried), then rolled or desiccated and immediately steamed or pan-dried to stop fermentation.
- **Black tea** is more heavily withered, then rolled or desiccated, allowed to ferment and then dried. Fermentation brings out the flavour of the tea and produces the characteristic brownish-black colour.

Herbal and fruit infusions aren't strictly speaking tea at all — they don't contain any *Camellia sinensis*. They usually consist of one or a blend of botanicals (such as camomile, peppermint or lemongrass), and sometimes fruit and citrus peel (often called fruit infusions), as well as other flavours. Common ingredients are hibiscus and rosehip. A number of the herbal infusions we looked at call themselves 'tea', which is the common term but strictly speaking incorrect.

THE TEA PARTY'S OVER

In view of our findings, CHOICE thinks (and FSANZ agrees) the tea industry should apply to the food regulator to include the relevant pesticide MRLs in the Food Standards Code. In this way FSANZ can conduct a detailed assessment and also allow public consultation on any amendments to the code that may be required.

The Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) told us it doesn't test imported tea (or herbal infusions) for pesticides, just a visual inspection for things like insects and gravel. It takes its directions from FSANZ, which currently doesn't ask AQIS to test for pesticides in tea.

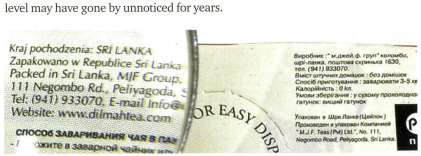
FSANZ itself sometimes tests for pesticides in brewed tea in its regular Total Diet Survey. In the nineteenth survey it tested nine brewed tea samples and found no detectable residue. This is hardly enough samples to give a true picture. In the twentieth survey it didn't test any tea.

The upshot is that inadequate monitoring has meant that residues in tea and herbal infusions at any level may have gone by unnoticed for years.

BREWED VS DRY TEA

We looked at pesticide levels in dry tea (and that's what MRLs are based on), but how much of this transfers into your brew?

A recent study found that how soluble a pesticide is in water has a lot to do with it. Hardly any organochlorines or pyrethrins end up in the brew because they're not water-soluble, whereas a significant amount of an organophosphate does because they are.


Kraj pochodzenia: SRI LANKA
Zapakowano w Republice Sri Lanka
Packed in Sri Lanka, MJF Group,
111 Negombo Rd., Peliyagoda,
Tel: (941) 933070, E-mail: info@
Website: www.dilmahtea.com
СПОСОБ ЗАВАРИВАНИЯ ЧАЯ В ПАК
Производим и упаковал Компаний
"M.J.F. Teas (Pvt) Ltd.", No. 111,
Negombo Road, Peliyagoda, Sri Lanka

You need a magnifying glass to make out that this tea is 'packed in Sri Lanka', and it doesn't say that it's made from ingredients imported into Sri Lanka (from China). CHOICE thinks this breaks the Food Standards Code on two counts: a label should be legible and if ingredients are imported it should say where they're imported from.

Brand and name (in alphabetical order within groups)	1 Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Pesticide residues (ppm)
BLACK TEA WITH PESTICIDE RESIDUE			
BILLY TEA 100 Tea Bags	Mainly Indonesia and PNG	Tetley	Fenvalerate 0.03; bifenthrin 0.01
BLACK & GOLD Tea Pot Bags	Australia, other countries	AAPW	Permethrin 0.06
BUSHELLS Blue Label Tagged Tea Bags	Various countries, mainly Indonesia **(A)**	Unilever	Fenvalerate 0.01; dicofol 0.03
FARMLAND Cup or Pot	Imported **(B)**	Coles Myer	Bifenthrin 0.01
FORMOSAN Natural Formosan Tea	Taiwan	Formosan Tea Australia	Cypermethrin 0.22; fenvalerate 0.07; dicofol 0.01; endosulfan sulphate 0.01; phosalone 0.02
IGA Tea Bags	Imported **(B)**	AAPW	Bifenthrin 0.01
LAN CHOO Choice Small Leaf 100 Tagged Tea Bags	Various countries, mainly Indonesia **(A)**	Unilever	Fenvalerate 0.05
SAVINGS 100 Tea Cup Bags	Sri Lanka	Coles Myer	Ethion 0.008
BLACK TEA – ALL CLEAR			
DAINTREE Tea	Australia	Daintree Tea Co	Nothing detected
DILMAH Tea Cup Bags	Sri Lanka	Dilmah	Nothing detected
HARRIS Gold	Imported **(B)**	Douwe Egberts	Nothing detected
HOME BRAND 200 Tea Cup Bags	Imported **(B)**	Woolworths	Nothing detected
LIPTON Quality Number 1 Tea	Various countries, mainly India **(A)**	Unilever	Nothing detected
MADURA TEA Premium Blend	Sri Lanka, Australia	Madura Tea Estate	Nothing detected
NATURE'S CUPPA Organic Pure Ceylon Tea	Sri Lanka	Eat Rite	Nothing detected
NERADA 50 Tea Cup Bags	Australia	Nerada Tea	Nothing detected
NO FRILLS 100 Tea Cup Bags	Australia, other countries	Franklins	Nothing detected
TETLEY Tea Cup Bags	Imported **(B)**	Tetley	Nothing detected
TWININGS English Breakfast	Imported **(B)**	Manassen Foods	Nothing detected
TWININGS Lapsang Souchong Tea	China	Manassen Foods	Nothing detected
GREEN TEA WITH PESTICIDE RESIDUE			
BUTTERFLY China Green Tea	China	Fujian Holdings	Cypermethrin 0.07; fenvalerate 0.14; dicofol 0.04; bifenthrin 0.02
DILMAH Jasmine Pure Green Tea	China **(C)**	Dilmah	Cypermethrin 0.06; fenvalerate 0.14; dicofol 0.06; op-DDT 0.01; endosulfan sulphate 0.01
FORMOSAN Natural Chinese Green Formosan Tea	Taiwan	Formosan Tea Australia	Ethion 0.1; cypermethrin 0.24; fenvalerate 0.29; dicofol 0.08; bifenthrin 0.06; permethrin 0.76
NAKED FOODS Green Tea Lemon Grass & Rosehip	Imported **(B)**	Naked Foods	Chlorpyrifos 0.01; chlorpyrifos methyl 0.03; profenophos 0.15
NUTRILEAF NUTRI HEALTH FOODS Japanese Style Green Tea Sen-Cha	Imported **(B)**	Nutri Health Food Centre	Chlorfenvinphos 0.03; cypermethrin 0.03; fenvalerate 0.18; dicofol 0.02; bifenthrin 0.01
RED SEAL Green Tea	China, Japan	Ancient Distributors	Cypermethrin 0.25; fenvalerate 0.06; dicofol 0.02; endosulfan sulphate 0.01
SEN-CHA Green Tea	Japan	Jun Pacific Corporation	Isoxathion 0.01; chlorpyrifos 0.03; fenitrothion 0.01; fenvalerate 0.12; bifenthrin 0.04; prothiophos 0.13
GREEN TEA – ALL CLEAR			
HEALTHERIES Green Chai Tea	Germany	Healtheries	Nothing detected
LIPTON Organic Green Tea	India (organic estate) **(A)**	Unilever	Nothing detected
MADURA TEA Green Tea	Asia, Australia	Madura Tea Estate	Nothing detected
NATURE'S CUPPA Organic Green Tea	Sri Lanka	Eat Rite	Nothing detected
NERADA Organic Green Tea	Indonesia **(A)**	Nerada Tea	Nothing detected
PLANET ORGANIC Green Tea	Sri Lanka **(A)**	Planet Tea	Nothing detected
TEAS OF CEYLON The Australian Tea Company Green Tea	Sri Lanka	Oppidan	Nothing detected
TETLEY Emperor's Garden Wisp Of Jasmine Green Tea	Imported **(B)**	Tetley	Nothing detected
TOYONO Japanese Style Green Tea	China	Oriental Merchant	Nothing detected
TWININGS Java Green Tea	Indonesia (Java)	Manassen Foods	Nothing detected

ppm *Parts per million (mg/kg).*
AAPW *Australian Asia Pacific Wholesalers.*
(A) *Label only says 'imported'; this is what the companies told us.*
(B) *No further country of origin information was given to us.*
(C) *The label says only 'packed in Sri Lanka'; the company told us the tea is from China.*
(D) *This product has been reformulated since our test and the apple ingredient removed.*
(E) *This product has been discontinued since our test but you might still find old stock on shelves.*
(F) *The lemongrass comes from two certified organic farms in Queensland.*

Brand and name (in alphabetical order within groups)	1 Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Pesticide residues (ppm)
HERBAL INFUSION WITH PESTICIDE RESIDUE			
HEALTHERIES Echinacea Tea	Germany	Healtheries	Ethion 0.007
LIPTON Herbal Infusions Ginseng & Lime **(D)**	Various countries **(A)**	Unilever	Chlorpyrifos 0.02; cypermethrin 0.06; fenvalerate 0.02; prothiophos 0.01; phosalone 0.23
LIPTON Herbal Infusions Lemon Soother	Various countries **(A)**	Unilever	Ethion 0.005; chlorpyrifos 0.01; dicofol 0.04; prothiophos 0.005
LIPTON Herbal Infusions Orange Refresher	Various countries **(A)**	Unilever	Ethion 0.01; chlorpyrifos 0.03; methidathion 0.03; malathion 0.006; dicofol 0.02;
RED SEAL Lemon & Ginger Sensation **(E)**	New Zealand	Ancient Distributors	Chlorpyrifos 0.01
TWININGS Cranberry, Raspberry & Elderflower Herbal Infusions	Imported **(B)**	Manassen Foods	Triazophos 0.01; pentachlorophenol 0.02
HERBAL INFUSIONS – ALL CLEAR			
CELESTIAL SEASONINGS Lemon Zinger	USA	Stuart Alexander & Co	Nothing detected
HEALTHERIES St John's Wort Tea with Blended Berries	Germany	Healtheries	Nothing detected
KIN KIN TEA Lemon Grass Herbal Tea	Australia **(F)**	Moran Group Herbs	Nothing detected
NATURELAND Night Cup Herb Tea Bags	Various countries **(B)**	Cantarella Bros	Nothing detected
NATURELAND Rosehip Herb Tea Bags	Various countries **(B)**	Cantarella Bros	Nothing detected
NERADA Echinacea Herbal Infusion	Egypt **(A)**	Nerada Tea	Nothing detected
NUMULGI Lemongrass Tea	Australia **(F)**	Moran Group Herbs	Nothing detected
ONNO BEHRENDS TEE Rosehip Tea	Germany	Abel Lemon Dist.	Nothing detected
SUPERB Rosehip Herbal Tea	Macedonia	Spiroski Food Imports	Nothing detected
TASTY Rosehip and Hibiscus Tea	Germany	Menora Foods	Nothing detected
TWININGS Lemon & Ginger Herbal Infusions	Imported **(B)**	Manassen Foods	Nothing detected
TWININGS Raspberry & Peach Fruit Infusions	Imported **(B)**	Manassen Foods	Nothing detected

PESTICIDE GUIDE

Pesticides are designed to kill pests ranging from insects and animals to micro-organisms such as fungi, moulds, bacteria and viruses. Unfortunately many pesticides can pose risks to people as well as the pests. The health effects depend on the type of pesticide and of course the level of exposure.

Pesticides have been associated with causing a whole range of problems including nerve damage, cancer and birth defects, and some are hormone disruptors (they interfere with the proper functioning of oestrogen, androgen and the thyroid hormone).

The pesticides we found in this test fall into the following classes:

- **Organophosphates**: chlorfenvinphos, chlorpyrifos, chloropyrifos methyl, ethion, fenitrothion, isoxathion, malathion, methidathion, phosalone, profenophos, prothiophos, triazophos.
- **Organochlorines**: op-DDT, dicofol, endosulfan sulphate, pentachlorophenol.
- **Pyrethrins**: bifenthrin, cypermethrin, fenvalerate, permethrin.

1 Origin

A number of the products didn't specify where the tea or herbal infusion ingredients came from. This is legal because of weak country of origin labelling regulations that only require the label to say the product is made from 'imported ingredients'. CHOICE is pushing for much stronger laws, where manufacturers will have to disclose the country/countries the ingredients come from.

GO ORGANIC?

While not an absolute guarantee, eating certified organic foods (including tea) should greatly reduce how much pesticide you eat and drink. For more on organic food as well as what 'certified organic' means, see CHOICE, September 2000, or go to www.choice.com.au and type 'organic food' in the search box (access to this article is free).

The label proudly claims the tea is "grown without residual pesticides". Setting aside the nonsensical English (you don't grow tea with 'residual pesticides', you get the residues afterwards), this seems pretty ironic in view of our findings. This tea contained a cocktail of pesticides.

IN A NUTSHELL

A far cry from our test *almost three years ago, this time we found no serious safety issues — a refreshing change.*

While the introduction *of an Australian safety standard for portable cots seems to have had a positive impact on their design, it's still only voluntary, not mandatory.*

Portable cots

Mostly good news from a cots test for a change.

STANDARD VS PORTABLE

You may be wondering, given the disappointing results of our recent testing of standard household cots (CHOICE, Jan/Feb 2002), whether it's better to use a portable cot all the time instead.

Unfortunately they're not as durable as standard cots, and they're lower — not the best for your back if you're constantly lifting a baby in and out.

WHAT TO BUY

Any of the nine models tested is OK, but if you have a wide choice where you're shopping, see *Not quite perfect*, right, for some minor drawbacks in a few models.

It's a sad fact that much of the testing CHOICE has conducted over the years on baby products has produced results that are less than satisfactory and often downright scary. We last tested portable cots in July 2000, just after the introduction of a voluntary Australian safety standard. At that point, none of the nine tested cots satisfactorily met all the safety requirements of the standard.

Nearly three years down the track, it seems manufacturers have really lifted their game. Although the standard for portable cots is still only voluntary, manufacturers appear to have taken note, and in most cases the finger entrapment hazards and stability issues we found in our last test have been addressed.

We'd like to be able to say the same for standard household cots. But even though the Australian safety standard for them is mandatory, in the last test of nine that we published in CHOICE (Jan/Feb 2002), only one passed all of our tests, four had minor hazards and four failed several parts of the standard, including some limb entrapment hazards and other fairly serious failures.

This time we tested the nine portable cots we could find on the market and are happy to report that the majority of them complied with the tests in the standard that we think are most important.

NOT QUITE PERFECT

We did find three areas where certain cots didn't quite meet the standard. While we don't think they're of significant safety concern they're certainly worth bearing in mind.

Part of the standard says there should be no sharp edges or points. Both the **BABY LOVE** and **STEELCRAFT Harmony** cots have edges on the four moulded plastic corner pieces that are a bit sharper than the standard specifies. This could potentially mean a minor bump on the head for the baby.

When we last tested them, six of the nine portable cots had finger entrapments. This test found a problem with only one — the **GRACO** cot has a minor finger entrapment in all four corners. While it isn't enough to cause serious injury, it could cause the baby pain if they got their finger stuck.

If you plan to use the cot mainly on a smooth floor surface such as tiles or polished floorboards, you may want to keep in mind that the **EIC**, **GRACO**, and **MOTHER'S CHOICE** cots were all able to be pushed across the floor at less than the force required by the standard. While the cot shouldn't topple over, an older

Brand / model (in alphabetical order within groups)	Padded mattress / base	Fitte shee
PASSED ALL OUR SAFETY AND PERFORMANCE TESTS		
CHILDCARE Easy n Lite Travel Cot CF600 **(A)**	✓	✓
CHILDCARE Porta Nap Travel Cot CC7510W	✓	
STEELCRAFT Regency 32125 **(A)**	✓	✓
SWALLOW Lite 'n' Easy Wheeler 07580916	✓	
MINOR FAULTS ONLY (see the text for details)		
BABY LOVE Portacot Cruiser	✓	
EIC (LOVE N CARE) Playland BP 999	✓	
GRACO Pack 'n' Play Portable Playard 9120JJ **(B)**	✓	
MOTHER'S CHOICE Noah's Ark	✓	
MOTHER'S CHOICE Just Pooh **(C)**	✓	
STEELCRAFT Harmony 32209 **(A)**	✓	✓

ns Not stated.

* *Rounded to the nearest kilogram/centimetre.*

** *Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in March 2003, except for the Baby Love and Graco, where they're the price we paid.*

(A) *Discontinued, but you may still find it in shops.*

ANTHONY SAMES

Seen one, seen 'em all: the nine portable cots tested are a similar shape, size and design. You can pretty well buy on price (or even colour), though see* Not quite perfect, *below left, for a few models with minor drawbacks.

child might be able to push it into a wall, say, which could be a problem if the baby was standing at the time.

THE PORTABLE ASPECT

It's important a portable cot is easy to assemble, disassemble and transport. The nine tested are all very similar in design, and there was very little difference in their ease of assembly, folding up and packing away. It's certainly an acquired skill, but once mastered, fairly easy to do.

One minor disadvantage we found is that the bases of the **STEELCRAFT** models are heavier in comparison to the other models, and are a bit difficult to lift in and out of the cot. Something your back may appreciate you keeping in mind.

What to look for

SAFETY

- The cot should have two locking mechanisms to prevent accidental collapse and closure.
- Make sure there are no protrusions or sharp edges.
- Look for possible entrapment areas that the baby could get their head or a finger or limb stuck in.
- Make sure there's nothing that could be used as a foothold for the baby to climb out.
- If the cot has wheels or castors, make sure it also has brakes or some other mechanism to stop it rolling away.
- The mattress should be firm and fit snugly into the base without gaps at the sides or ends.
- The cot floor shouldn't sag. Press down on it to test.
- The fabric and mesh sides should be stretched tightly.
- If the base has Velcro strips to secure it to the cot, make sure they're long enough to be easily threaded through the hole for attachment to the cot.

FEATURES

See the table for which cots have these particular features.

- The cot should be easy to assemble and fold up (all these are), not be too heavy and have a carry bag.
- The mesh sides should provide good ventilation and allow you to easily see the baby.
- A pocket on the outside — out of reach of the baby — is handy for storage.
- An insect net for the top will keep out larger insects, but smaller ones like mosquitoes may still get in through the side mesh.
- Some cots have a removable fitted sheet that can be washed.
- A bassinet, which sits higher up in the cot so that you don't have to reach down so far to reach the baby. This is only suitable for a younger baby who can't sit or stand up.

esh anels on sides	Pocket	Carry bag	Wheels	Brakes	Insect net	Bassinet	Max weight / height suitability (kg / cm)*	Weight (kg)*	Folded dimensions (L x W x H, cm)*	Assembled dimensions (L x W x H, cm)*	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price ($)**
	✓	✓	Two	✓	✓		14 / 86	12	84 x 28 x 27	112 x 83 x 83	1	China	CO White	169
	✓	✓	Two	✓		✓	14 / 86	11 / 13 **(E)**	84 x 28 x 27	112 x 82 x 83	1	China	CO White	219
sides	✓	✓	Two	✓	✓		15 / 90	14	83 x 29 x 28	116 x 82 x 88	1 **(F)**	China	Britax Child-Care	189
	✓	✓	Two	✓			14 / 85	12	83 x 28 x 28	112 x 83 x 83	1	China	Babyco	149
	✓	✓					14 / 89	11	83 x 24 x 24	110 x 78 x 82	1	China	Baby Love	140
	✓	✓	Two	**(D)**	✓		15 / ns	10	80 x 28 x 28	111 x 84 x 79	1	China	EIC	189
		✓					14 / 89	9	80 x 26 x 25	104 x 73 x 80	ns	China	Rubbermaid	169
	✓	✓	Two	✓			14 / 85	10	80 x 28 x 27	112 x 78 x 83	1	China	IGC	169
	✓	✓	Two	✓			14 / 85	10	80 x 28 x 27	112 x 78 x 83	1	China	IGC	169
	✓	✓					15 / 90	14	80 x 29 x 27	115 x 79 x 80	1 **(F)**	China	Britax Child-Care	179

(B) *The distributor recently changed, and the product may not be widely available.*

(C) *Technically identical to the Mother's Choice Noah's Ark, which was the model tested.*

(D) *Designed so that the wheels aren't on the floor when the cot is resting on the floor; the opposite end must be lifted up for the wheels to operate.*

(E) *Without bassinet/with bassinet.*

(F) *The warranty says the product is replaced within the first three months; however, if any product develops a fault within a 'reasonable' time, you're entitled to replacement or repair.*

ANTHONY SAWERS

ARE BACTERIA LURKING IN YOUR CUSTARD TART?

While a custard tart may look innocent enough, recent testing for Food Safety Victoria has confirmed that custard, cream or mock cream-filled products, such as custard tarts, cream buns and vanilla slices, are good environments for the growth of bacteria when they're kept at room temperature. Bacteria thrive at temperatures between 5°C and 60°C, and the high water content in these products is also to their liking.

To make sure your next bakery experience is a well-deserved treat without a nasty aftershock, only buy this sort of product if it's displayed in a refrigerated cabinet, which should be below 5°C.

Can't or won't?

We've highlighted numerous examples in these pages of products that we think flout the current laws on health claims (briefly, the law says that, in general, food products can't make health claims). There's a review of the health claims prohibition at the moment, but even so, interest in doing something about them seems to be at an all-time low.

A recent response from regulators and enforcement agencies to a complaint by the Australian Self-Medication Industry (ASMI) about several products' claims has revealed an apparently blank wall of inaction.

The response to three of the four products complained about was that their claims are not clear-cut, so the state enforcement agencies are reluctant to take any action until the review of health claims is completed.

However, while the fourth — **BROWNES Heart Plus** (milk with omega-3 fat) — has received some attention from WA Health to its website and promotional materials (which it's since toned down), it's the inaction on its label that concerns CHOICE. It seems extraordinary that some of the label claims (see below) aren't categorised as health claims. WA Health says no action on the labelling is being taken because its lawyers think the case could be argued either way.

CHOICE is flabbergasted that a company is getting away with all this label says and implies: it doesn't bode well for the likely outcome of the review currently under way. Nor for consumers increasingly faced with an out-of-control marketplace that will apparently go to any lengths to boost sales.

Brownes Heart Plus has been specially formulated to improve the performance of the heart and cardio-vascular system as part of a balanced diet combined with regular physical activity.

It does this in 4 ways:

- ✓ Marine Omega-3 nutrients lower the blood triglyceride levels and help maintain a regular heart beat.
- ✓ Antioxidants (Vitamins C & E) enable the body to use Omega-3 nutrients efficiently by neutralising harmful free radicals.
- ✓ Folate, along with Vitamins B_6 and B_{12}, helps maintain a good flow of blood through the arteries.
- ✓ Low in fat and cholesterol.

ANTHONY SAWERS

Cooked in vegetable oil ...

While it doesn't contain cholesterol, not all vegetable oil is healthy unsaturated fat. **Palm oil** is widely used in the food industry (both fast and processed) and is 50% saturated fat, while **coconut oil** is 90% saturated — and saturated fat is worse news for your arteries than cholesterol itself.

Better choices are oils such as avocado, canola, olive and peanut, which are mostly monounsaturated, and predominantly polyunsaturated oils like sunflower, safflower, soybean, cottonseed, sesame seed and grape seed.

Unfortunately there's no requirement for food manufacturers to state what oil is used in processed food (unless it's peanut, soybean or sesame oil, as some people are allergic to these), but it's worth checking the ingredients list to see if the particular type is stated. If a manufacturer's using a 'good' oil they'll probably want to tell you.

Handle with CARE

Most oven cleaners are very effective, but the ingredients that make them effective also make them dangerous.

It's not a pretty sight — an oven covered in baked-on grime and grease. If you haven't been wiping up food spills after using the oven, you'll need a lot of elbow grease or a specially formulated oven cleaner to deal with it. To find out which oven cleaners deliver a sparkling-clean oven without you having to work hard, we tested all available products from major supermarkets.

We uniformly stained specially prepared enamel panels with a mixture of grime and fat, which we then baked. We compared how effective the cleaners were at removing the grime after the recommended short cleaning time and/or a longer 24-hour cleaning time (see the notes on page 39 for more test details).

ACTIVE (BUT DANGEROUS) INGREDIENTS

One of the most common oven cleaner active ingredients is sodium hydroxide, known as caustic soda, or simply caustic. It's active because it reacts with fats, converting them into water-soluble soapy compounds that you can wipe away.

However, sodium hydroxide is dangerous stuff. It's highly corrosive, even in dilute forms, and can attack organic matter. So if it comes into contact with skin or eyes, it can cause severe irritation, deep burns or even blindness.

The active ingredient in the most effective non-caustic products is ethanolamine, also called monoethanolamine. This solvent has its hazards too — it can cause coughing, headache, shortness of breath, sore throat, asthmatic reactions and it can affect the central nervous system — and that's just the effects of short-term exposure.

Other oven cleaners contain diethyl glycol alkyl ethers, a group of chemicals also known as ethylene glycol ethers or EGEs. Some of these have been implicated in causing birth defects when long-term exposure has occurred. Others in this chemical family appear not to have this adverse effect, although some of them have been shown to have destructive effects on blood cells.

We asked the manufacturers of products that contain EGEs which type they use. Both **EASY OFF** and both **MR MUSCLE** products contain a kind of EGE thought not to be linked with birth defects.

Oven cleaners can also contain 'alkaline salts' — a vague term not loaded with information. See *Look after yourself*, page 38, for the safety precautions to take when using all these products.

COMING CLEAN — AND NOT SO CLEAN

With the two most effective products, **NO FRILLS** and **HOME BRAND**, all we had to do to remove most of the baked-on grime and grease after 24 hours was simply wipe the panels with a damp cloth. These products are

IN A NUTSHELL

- **You don't have spend** *a lot to shift the grease from a really dirty oven: two of the cheapest cleaners,* ***NO FRILLS*** *and* ***HOME BRAND****, were the top performers.*
- **Oven cleaners were** *traditionally made of caustic soda (sodium hydroxide). This time several of the top-performing products are non-caustic — they require more time to work than caustic types but may be easier on the nose. They have their own risks, though — see left.*

TIPS FOR A CLEANER OVEN

- *Roast at lower temperatures when possible to reduce fat splattering.*
- *Cover dishes with aluminium foil or ovensafe lids.*
- *Use disposable foil oven trays to catch drips.*
- *To reduce grease and grime build-up, give your oven a quick wipe after each use — you won't need to use oven cleaner so often.*

Look after yourself

- Read the instructions carefully and follow all recommended safety precautions.
- Make sure your kitchen is well ventilated before you start using an oven cleaner
- Wear, as a minimum, long rubber or plastic gloves and a long-sleeved shirt. Long trousers and covered shoes are also advisable. After you finish, remove your protective clothing and wash it as soon as possible. Accidental spills on clothing could go unnoticed, soak through and damage your skin.
- Wear eye protection; specially designed safety glasses are best.
- Avoid breathing in fumes as much as possible. It's even worth wearing a mask as fumes from some ingredients are toxic.
- Don't use cleaners near naked flames or other potential sources of ignition. Most aerosol sprays contain flammable propellents or solvents.
- If you have small children, choose a cleaner with a childproof lid — check the table for products that have one — and store out of children's reach.
- Wash your hands well before you eat, drink or smoke.

... AND YOUR ENVIRONMENT

- Cover the floor beneath and immediately surrounding your oven with newspaper. Place paper over the gap between the door and the oven floor.
- Avoid applying the cleaner to the oven's light, heating elements, fan or door seals.
- Don't use a caustic cleaner on aluminium, painted surfaces or glass — it'll attack these surfaces.
- Use a neutralising solution when you're finished. First, wipe up excess residue with paper towel, then wipe out the oven with a 10% solution of vinegar.
- Don't dispose of unused cleaner down the drain. Use it all and put the wrapped-up empty can in the garbage bin. Also check with your local council to see if it operates household chemical collections.

Brand (in rank order)	PERFORMANCE 1 Overall score (%)	2 Ease of use score (%)	3 24-hour cleaning score (%)	3 Short-per cleaning sc (%)
NO FRILLS	86	88	85	na **(C)**
HOME BRAND	83	88	80	na **(C)**
EASY OFF Heavy Duty	79	80	80	75
MR MUSCLE Fast Clean	79	80	80	75
AMWAY Blast Off	76	78	na **(B)**	75
K2r Oven & Microwave Cleaner	74	80	75	65
SELLEYS Oven Kleen Fast	72	83	na **(B)**	65
MR MUSCLE Non Caustic	69	88	60	53
EASY OFF Non Caustic Fume Free	68	85	60	53
OVEN MATE (A)	67	63	na **(B)**	70
RELIANCE	56	80	na **(B)**	40
CITRACLEAN BBQ and Oven Cleaner	55	78	na **(B)**	40

WHAT TO BUY

Best overall:

NO FRILLS	BEST BUY	$1.94
HOME BRAND	BEST BUY	$1.99

For a quick job:

EASY OFF Heavy Duty	BEST BUY	$2.99
MR MUSCLE Fast Clean		$3.30
AMWAY Blast Off		$10.10

also easy to apply and produce fumes that aren't too irritating — and they're among the cheapest cleaners.

The two worst performers, **CITRACLEAN** and **RELIANCE**, were easy to use too but were very ineffective cleaners. Both left a considerable amount of grime on the panels even after scouring.

These products contain neither sodium hydroxide nor ethanolamine: **CITRACLEAN** is a variety of soaps with a citrus fruit extract, and **RELIANCE** contains alkaline salts. These cleaners aren't worth the money — especially **CITRACLEAN**, the most expensive tested at $11.10.

IT'S A KNOCKOUT?

If you're pressed for time and want a fast-acting oven cleaner, the best choices are **AMWAY**, **EASY OFF Heavy Duty** or **MR MUSCLE Fast Clean**. These scored best in the short cleaning test, all of them doing a commendable job after a 30-minute application, but the result wasn't quite as sparkling as the top scorers in the 24-hour test.

It's probably no accident that these three cleaned fast and well — all of them contain sodium hydroxide. In this test the caustic-based cleaners generally worked faster than non-caustic products. However, another drawback of sodium hydroxide is that the fumes it produces can be irritating. People suffering from any respiratory illness definitely shouldn't use a caustic oven cleaner. See *Look after yourself*, left, for more.

SPECIFICATIONS

ort cleaning ne	Odour	Active ingredient/s (as stated on the can)	Oven temperature	Type	Childproof lid	Size (g)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price ($)*
	Moderate	Ethanolamine 12.2%	Cold	Aerosol		300	Australia	Franklins	1.94
	Moderate	Ethanolamine 12.2.%	Cold	Aerosol		400	Australia	Woolworths	1.99
r 30 min **(D)**	Moderate	Sodium hydroxide 4.9%, diethyl glycol alkyl ether 5% **(F)**	Warm / cold	Aerosol		400	Australia	Reckitt Benckiser	2.99
min	Strong	Sodium hydroxide 4.22%, diethyl glycol alkyl ether 11.8% **(F)**	Cold	Aerosol	✓	300	Australia	SC Johnson	3.30
min	Strong	Sodium hydroxide 6.65% **(G)**	Cold	Aerosol	✓	400	Not stated	Amway	10.10
4 hr **(E)**	Moderate	Not stated **(H)**	Cold	Aerosol		400	Australia	Biovital	3.60
min	Moderate	Sodium hydroxide 3.90% **(J)**	Cold	Aerosol	✓	350	Australia	Selleys	2.79
hr	Moderate	Alkaline salts 3.7% **(F)**	Cold	Aerosol	✓	300	Australia	SC Johnson	3.30
hr	Moderate	Diethyl glycol alkyl ether 9.5%, alkaline salts 4.75% **(F)** **(G)**	Cold	Aerosol		400	Australia	Reckitt Benckiser	3.04
min	Moderate	Caustic soda 5%	Warm	Trigger	✓ **(K)**	500 mL	Australia	March Enterprises	2.99
4 hr **(E)**	Moderate	Alkaline salts 4.5%	Cold	Aerosol		300	Australia	Coles	1.91
min	Moderate	Various surfactants, purified citrus extract	Cold	Gel		500	Australia	New Technology Products	11.10

* *The price we paid in December 2002.*

na *Not applicable.*

(A) *The name of this product will change to Bixol Oven and BBQ Cleaner; the formulation will remain the same as tested.*

(B) *These products aren't recommended for (or don't suggest) overnight use.*

(C) *These products don't have a short cleaning time indicated.*

(D) *Five minutes in a warm oven or 30 minutes in a cold one: both scored 75%.*

(E) *Tested at four hours.*

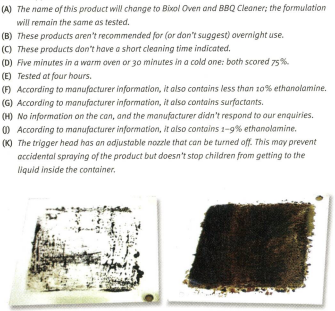
(F) *According to manufacturer information, it also contains less than 10% ethanolamine.*

(G) *According to manufacturer information, it also contains surfactants.*

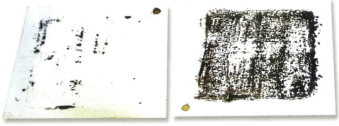
(H) *No information on the can, and the manufacturer didn't respond to our enquiries.*

(J) *According to manufacturer information, it also contains 1–9% ethanolamine.*

(K) *The trigger head has an adjustable nozzle that can be turned off. This may prevent accidental spraying of the product but doesn't stop children from getting to the liquid inside the container.*



Examples of the best and worst results for the short-period cleaning tests.



TEST PHOTOS: TABITHA SMITH

Examples of the best and worst results for the 24-hour cleaning tests.

1 Overall score

This consists of the following:

- Ease of use: 40%
- 24-hour cleaning score: 30%
- Short-period cleaning score: 30%

If a product doesn't have a recommended short cleaning time, the 24-hour cleaning score makes up 60% of the overall score. Similarly, if a cleaner isn't recommended for overnight cleaning, the short-period cleaning score is 60% of the overall score.

2 Ease of use score

This reflects how easy the product was to apply to the interior of an oven, including how well it covered and adhered to the surfaces. Also factored in were the level of fumes emitted and the clarity and usefulness of the directions.

3 24-hour and short-period cleaning scores

Enamel test panels were uniformly coated with a food mixture (measured quantities of milk, sugar, cherry and tomato juice, vegetable oil, fat, flour and raw egg). This was then baked onto the panels for an hour and a half at 250°C. Once the panels had cooled we applied a second coat of food mixture and baked again. A third bake was performed the next day without application of food mixture.

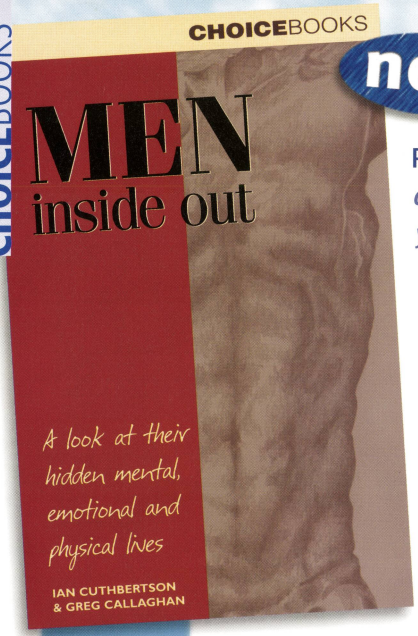
We scored the cleaners' ability to remove the baked-on food mixture after wiping the panels with a damp cloth after the recommended short period (if applicable), and after a 24-hour application (if applicable). We tested each product twice.

An endorsement circus?

The manufacturer of **CITRACLEAN** claims it to be ideal for arthritis and swollen joint sufferers, and the packaging even features an Arthritis Foundation of Australia endorsement icon.

However, when we contacted the Arthritis Foundation to find out what makes this product particularly good for people with arthritis and swollen joints, it told us it didn't endorse the product in any way.

When we challenged the manufacturer of **CITRACLEAN** with this information we were told the endorsement was organised about six years ago through a previous CEO of the Arthritis Foundation. The current CEO was unable to rule out this possibility, but has asked the manufacturer of **CITRACLEAN** to stop using the Foundation's logo, which it's agreed to do.



new

PARTNERS: *how much do you know about your man's health?*

MEN INSIDE OUT

A look at their hidden mental, emotional and physical lives

Ian Cuthbertson and Greg Callaghan

Why is men's health such a backburner topic?

It's a sad fact but true: most men probably take more interest in their bank balance, car or local football team than they do in their health. Could that explain why, compared to women, men suffer twice the rate of heart disease, are 3.5 times more likely to die of alcoholism, and four times more likely to commit suicide?

The solution is not for men to become neurotic hypochondriacs, but to find a middle ground — a place where a man can retain his dignity but bring a little sense to some of today's common men's health issues.

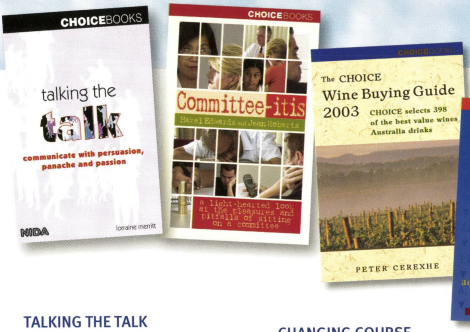
$25.00
Code: MEN

Men Inside Out is divided into four major sections. It looks at men's sexual health, mental health and wellbeing, physical health and general health. Topics covered include:

- Circumcision, sexually transmitted diseases, sexual performance and orientation.
- Mental illness, including schizophrenia and depression.
- When, why and where to seek help.
- Staying healthy mentally.
- Problems with: the prostate, the heart, drugs and alcohol.
- Divorce and separation.
- Fitness for different age groups.
- Exercise gimmicks, injuries and Golden Rules.
- Building and feeding muscle.
- The male diet.

Men Inside Out mentions the unmentionables, the difficult issues that health writers often shy away from. It probes some of the riddles and hypocrisies, and uncovers a few home truths about men. Rather than taking the clinical text approach, this book recognises that first and foremost men are people with feelings, sexual appetites and fears.

CONSUMER BOOKSHELF



TALKING THE TALK

Does the thought of public speaking give you butterflies in the stomach, a dry throat and limbs made of jelly? The cure — read *Talking the Talk: communicate with persuasion, panache and passion.*

$20.00 **CODE: TALK**

COMMITTEE-ITIS

A humorous yet practical book demystifying committee dynamics and procedures. It includes definitions, advice lists, anecdotes and practical advice.

$20.00 **CODE: COMM**

THE CHOICE WINE GUIDE 2003

398 wines enjoyed by Australians, independently tasted and evaluated.

$30.00 **CODE: WG03**

TAP THE HIDDEN JOB MARKET

Over 80% of jobs are never advertised — why limit yourself to only 20% of the market? Learn how to access all the 'hidden' jobs and find the best one for you.

$25.00 **CODE: THJM**

FROM FEAR TO COURAGE

Learn how to manage your career crises and discover the career — and life — you deserve.

$22.00 **CODE: FFTC**

CHANGING COURSE

Retirement and redundancy are major life changes, so use this advice to ensure you make the most of them.

$22.00 **CODE: CHCO**

CONTRACEPTION

An easily understood guide to all currently available methods of contraception in Australia.

$22 .00 **CODE: CONT**

WARM HOUSE COOL HOUSE

See how clever design can keep a house cooler in summer and warmer in winter — and still allow it to be an attractive, livable home.

$33.00 **CODE: WHCH**

SUSTAINABLE HOUSE

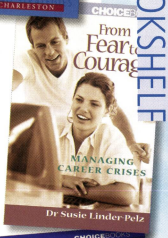
A guide to how one family renovated their Sydney terrace to be almost self-sufficient in water and power.

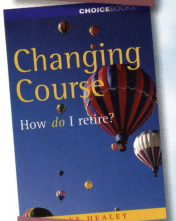
$35.00 **CODE: SUSH**

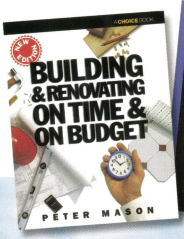
BUILDING AND RENOVATING ON TIME AND ON BUDGET

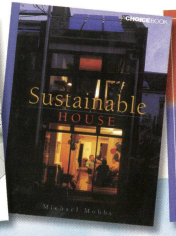
Keep control of the processes and budget when renovating or building your home.

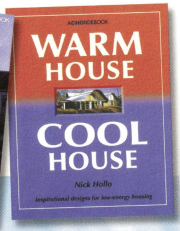
$22.00 **CODE: BROT**

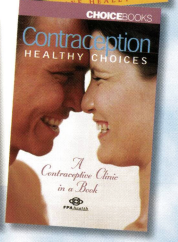




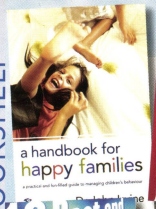


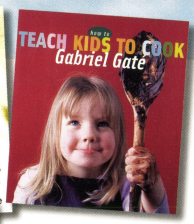


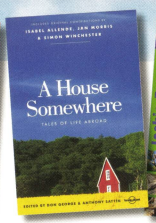


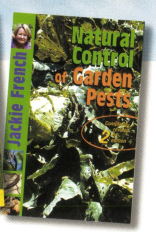


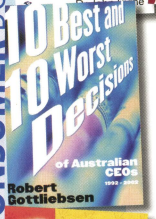
CONSUMER BOOKSHELF

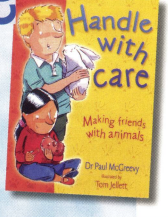












A HANDBOOK FOR HAPPY FAMILIES

This provides parents with practical information, advice and wisdom on how to help their children be happy from birth to adulthood. From sleeping and sharing to hyperactivity and bullying, from peer-pressure and coping with sex to drugs and alcohol, Dr John Irvine covers *the* issues in his clear, witty and approachable style.

$21.95 CODE: HFHF

10 BEST AND 10 WORST DECISIONS OF AUSTRALIAN CEOs 1992-2002

Looking at a decade of Australian business decisions, respected Australian business and finance journalist Robert Gottliebsen talks about the best and the worst. After reading this you'll understand better what makes a decision successful.

$29.95 CODE: BWDC

HANDLE WITH CARE

Explains to children how to behave around animals, both domesticated and wild. Endorsed by the RSPCA and Kidsafe.

$27.95 CODE: HWCA

HOW TO TEACH KIDS TO COOK

Gabriel Gaté shows how to have fun in the kitchen teaching children to cook, food know-how and kitchen safety.

$19.95 CODE: HTKC

A HOUSE SOMEWHERE

Even when travelling isn't possible, for some of us the wanderlust still screams to be satisfied. At these times it can help to savour the adventures of others, and *A House Somewhere* is a collection of wonderful pieces of contemporary travel writing. Read about love in California, barges on the Seine, and the plumbing in a rooftop flat in Delhi.

If you can't go you can dream, and *A House Somewhere* is a wonderful place to start.

$22.00 CODE: AHSW

NATURAL CONTROL OF GARDEN PESTS

For those who prefer to take a more natural approach to garden pests Jackie French offers a range of natural options for both repelling and killing insects. Written in an easy-to-understand style, it contains all the information you need about natural pest control.

$17.95 CODE: NCGP

ORDER FORM

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Bigger than Ben Hur!

Our update test of large and extra-large fridges finds six new models worth buying.

While shopping, you can get a 'feel' for a particular fridge — its convenience, layout, features and so on — but how well will that nice new white tower work? That's where CHOICE's performance tests come in.

A good fridge needs to maintain an appropriate range of fridge and freezer temperatures throughout the different seasons. Temperatures also need to be fairly uniform within each compartment and not vary greatly during operation, as this might make food lose its quality faster. It's also helpful if fresh-food and freezer temperatures are appropriate when set to the 'mid' or recommended setting, so that you don't have to fiddle with the controls a lot before you get the right temperatures. Our temperature performance tests cover all this.

Typical big fridge usage by large families, particularly those who entertain often, can mean frequent large loads of warm food being put in and more door openings than in smaller households. So it's important that large fridges can chill food rapidly; our cooling score rates this.

We also assess crisper performance — it's important your fruit and vegies keep fresh as long as possible and don't dry out, go mushy or freeze. Plus we check chiller temperatures and make sure the manufacturers' claimed energy efficiency ratings are accurate. See the last fridge test report in CHOICE, November 2002, or go to www.CHOICEextra.com.au, for more information about our tests.

ALL GOOD — BUT NOT PERFECT

The six large fridges we tested for this update all worked well, and you'd probably be happy with any of them. However, all were slightly let down in particular areas — it seems we'll have to wait a while yet for the perfect fridge.

The top-scoring large fridge, for example, the **KELVINATOR N520H**, worked very well in most of the temperature performance tests, but getting its temperature set correctly took some trial and error.

The best extra-large fridge, the **SAMSUNG Cool Tech SRL550DW**, was let down by large temperature fluctuations. See the profiles on page 44 for more details on the strengths and weaknesses of each fridge tested.

IN A NUTSHELL

- **The fridges tested** *for this update are the best large and extra-large fridges we've ever tested — but they're still not perfect.*
- **More and more** *large-size fridges feature electronic temperature control.*
- **Large fridges are** *generally becoming more energy-efficient.*

Profiles

The six models from this update are profiled in rank order. Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in February/March 2003.

WHAT TO BUY

Large fridges		
KELVINATOR N520H	BEST BUY	$1399
FISHER & PAYKEL Active Smart Tasman E521T		$1675
FISHER & PAYKEL Active Smart Tasman E522B		$1678
Extra-large fridges		
SAMSUNG Cool Tech Plus SRL550DW		$1999
WHIRLPOOL 6ER9GTKXKS		$1999
LG Smart Digital GR-S642AQ	BEST BUY	$1500

LARGE FRIDGES

The **KELVINATOR N520H** ($1399, top freezer) scored very well for energy efficiency. It cools fresh food quickly, has good storage versatility and very good crisper humidity. Its controls allow a good range of temperature combinations and it maintains fairly steady temperatures as the compressor stops and starts. It's also moderately quiet. However, setting the temperature tends to be trial and error and the door shelves bend a little under load.

The **FISHER & PAYKEL Active Smart Tasman E521T** ($1675, top freezer) is energy-efficient and cools down fresh food very fast. It has electronic temperature management with relatively independent temperature control between the freezer and fresh-food compartments. It also has very good temperature uniformity within each compartment, handles seasonal temperature changes reasonably well and has good storage versatility. It's also very quiet. However, its pushbutton controls don't allow very fine adjustment and there are large temperature fluctuations as the compressor stops and starts. It doesn't have a chiller and its door shelves bend a little under load.

The **FISHER & PAYKEL Active Smart Tasman E522B** ($1678, bottom freezer) scored well for cooling fresh food, handles seasonal temperature change very well and has very good crisper humidity. It has electronic temperature management, with relatively independent temperature control between the freezer and fresh-food compartments. It's also easy to use and is very quiet. But there's some temperature variation between areas of the freezer compartment, it doesn't have a chiller compartment and its door shelves bend a little under load. This model also has cold spots in the crispers that may freeze vegetables in particular areas.

EXTRA-LARGE FRIDGES

The **SAMSUNG Cool Tech Plus SRL550DW** ($1999, bottom freezer) has electronic temperature management, pushbutton controls and displays the fridge and freezer temperatures on the door. It has two cooling evaporators, allowing a high degree of independent fridge/freezer temperature control, and a through-the-door chilled water dispenser. It's very energy-efficient and cools fresh food fast. It's let down by large temperature fluctuations as the compressor stops and starts and it also lacks a dairy compartment.

The **WHIRLPOOL 6ER9GTKXKS** ($1999, top freezer) is a good all-round performer. It's very energy-efficient, very good at maintaining steady temperatures as the compressor stops and starts and has very good crisper humidity and good storage versatility. However, its fresh-food temperature is very warm on the 'mid' setting and it doesn't handle seasonal temperature changes as well as the other five fridges, while setting its temperature tends to be trial and error. Some people may find its freezer a little too cold even on its warmest setting. It also lacks a chiller and is relatively noisy.

The **LG Smart Digital GR-S642AQ** ($1500, top freezer) is energy-efficient and has good temperature uniformity as well as steady temperatures as the compressor stops and starts. Relatively quiet, it has combination conventional/electronic temperature controls. However, it's limited in the range of temperatures you can set in the fresh-food compartment, and the freezer may be too cold on colder fresh-food settings. It's also not the best at coping with seasonal temperature changes, has limited storage versatility and no dairy compartment.

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

All other large and extra-large fridges from our previous test that are still available are listed in the table on page 46. Several of these have significant temperature performance limitations — for their details see CHOICE, November 2002.

More and more efficient

Since 1999, meeting Minimum Energy Performance Standards (MEPS) has been a reality for fridge manufacturers. As part of the Australian standard, MEPS ensure that no grossly energy-inefficient fridges can be sold in Australia. Fridges sold here will have to meet even more stringent MEPS requirements scheduled to come into effect in late 2004 — good news for you and the environment.

For people with a disability

We asked an occupational therapist from the Independent Living Centre (NSW) to assess the fridges to see which are better for people with various disabilities.

If you have poor vision.
The **WHIRLPOOL 6ER9GTKXKS** rated best because it's well lit. Both **FISHER & PAYKEL Active Smart Tasman** models were also recommended.

If you're in a wheelchair or have a bad back.
Bottom-mounted freezers tend to make using both the fresh-food and freezer compartments easier, so the **FISHER & PAYKEL E522B** and the **SAMSUNG Cool Tech Plus** both rated well. For wheelchair users who prefer a top-mounted freezer, the **WHIRLPOOL 6ER9GTKXKS** is recommended, but this model isn't suitable if you have a bad back.

If you have upper limb dysfunction.
The accessible fresh-food compartments of the **SAMSUNG Cool Tech Plus** and **FISHER & PAYKEL E522B** make these fridges best for those with reach disabilities. For those with hand tremors, the **SAMSUNG** rated best. The **KELVINATOR N520H** and the **LG Smart Digital** are best if you have weak hands.

For those with a cognitive impairment.
The **KELVINATOR N520H** rated best because it has very simple labelling and conventional controls.

ALL GOOD FRIDGES HAVE...

For a general guide for what to look for in a fridge, see CHOICE, November 2002, or go to www.CHOICEextra.com.au.

Brand / model (in rank order within groups)	PERFORMANCE 1 Overall score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Temperature performance score (%)	Energy efficiency score (%)	Crisper freshness score (%)	Cooling score (%)	Cooling time (hr:min)	Claime measu energy (kWh /
LARGE FRIDGES: 451–525 L								
† **KELVINATOR** N520H **(A)**	75	70	74	79	86	77	3:53	649 / 6
† **FISHER & PAYKEL** Active Smart Tasman E521T **(B)**	74	74	71	75	78	82	3:27	671 / 6
† **FISHER & PAYKEL** Active Smart Tasman E522B **(B)**	72	76	71	65	85	70	4:25	790 / 7
SAMSUNG SR57NXA	69	68	73	71	61	60	5:09	697 / 6
MAYTAG GT1727PACW	65	60	56	71	88	79	3:44	700 / 7
WESTINGHOUSE Mastermind BJ505T **(C)**	64	77	66	52	77	49	5:47	900 / 9
LG GR572TF	60	66	68	68	52	12	8:44	650 / 7
NEC FR-480	60	63	54	67	62	61	5:02	675 / 7
WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso (Mastermind) BJ503T **(D)**	60	77	55	49	76	59	5:12	900 / 9
EXTRA-LARGE FRIDGES: MORE THAN 525 L								
† **SAMSUNG** Cool Tech Plus SRL550DW **(E)**	75	72	68	88	74	79	3:39	604 / 5
† **WHIRLPOOL** 6ER9GTKXKS **(F)**	71	68	67	77	89	63	4:47	632 / 6
† **LG** Smart Digital GR-S642AQ **(G)**	69	63	70	75	76	66	4:38	710 / 7
MAYTAG Plus GT1928PAGW	66	77	51	72	89	70	4:22	727 / 7
WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso (Freestyle) RJ533T **(D)**	64	73	64	58	81	49	5:42	890 / 8
GE Profile PTU527SAMRSS	63	62	66	60	60	61	4:49	904 / 8
WESTINGHOUSE Freestyle RJ532T **(C)**	62	73	63	47	85	52	5:32	890 / 9

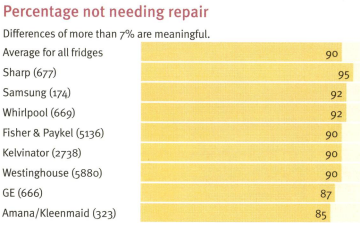
How reliable have subscribers found them?

We asked over 42,000 subscribers whether their fridge had needed repair in the previous 12 months. There wasn't much difference between brands, and fridges are generally reliable appliances — only 10% overall had needed repair.

The graphs only show the results for brands for which we received sufficient replies — we don't have reliability data for some brands mentioned in the article. The results include all types of fridge, not just those in this test. The number in brackets tells you how many readers reported on the brand.

Percentage not needing repair

Differences of more than 7% are meaningful.



		3 FEATURES			SPECIFICATIONS											
0-year ning ts (5)	Noise level (dB)	Chiller	Crisper drawers	Dairy compartment	Shelves removable when door open to 90° (fresh food / freezer)	Door hinge position	Freezer location	Measured dimensions (cm, H x W x D)*	Claimed total volume (L)	Claimed volume, fresh food (L)	Claimed volume, freezer (L)	Warranty (years)**	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price ($)***
59	36	✓ (H)	2	✓	✗ / ✓	R or L	Top	168 x 80 x 75	519	389	130	2	Australia	Electrolux	1399
13	33		2	✓	✓ / ✓	R or L, rev (B)	Top	170 x 80 x 71	517	400	117	2	Australia	Fisher & Paykel	1675
80	33		2	✓	✓ / ✗	R or L, rev (B)	Bottom	170 x 80 x 71	519	360	159	2	Australia	Fisher & Paykel	1678
56	37	✓	1		✗ / ✓	R	Top	182 x 75 x 73	495	349	146	2	Korea	Samsung	1299
78	42		2	✓	✓ / ✓	R or L	Top	169 x 70 x 80	498	346	152	5	USA	Maytag	1749
51	40	✓ (H)	2 (J)	✓	✗ / ✓	R	Bottom	170 x 80 x 72	500	317	186	2	Australia	Electrolux	1499
90	38	✓	2		✓ / ✓	R	Top	179 x 75 x 70	473	327	146	2	Korea	LG	1299
35	46		1		✗ / ✓	L	Top	183 x 76 x 72	506	355	151	2	Korea	NEC	1199
04	40	✓ (H)	2 (J)	✓	✗ / ✗	R or L	Bottom	171 x 80 x 73	500	317	186	2	Australia	Electrolux	1999
20	40	✓	1		✗ / ✓	R	Bottom	180 x 83 x 73	551	361	190	2	Korea	Samsung	1999
45	43		2 (J)	✓	✓ / ✓	R or L, rev	Top	169 x 77 x 80	564	406	161	2	USA	Whirlpool	1999
83	37	✓	2		✓ / ✓	R	Top	180 x 86 x 73	563	387	176	2	Korea	LG	1500
03	41	✓ (H)	2	✓	✓ / ✓	R or L, rev (K)	Top	171 x 76 x 75	550	378	167	5	USA	Maytag	2199
85	38	✓ (H)	2 (J)	✓	✗ / ✓	R or L	Top	171 x 80 x 73	530	384	148	2	Australia	Electrolux	1999
54	37	✓	1		✗ / ✗	R	Top	171 x 76 x 73	527	368	160	2	Taiwan	Shriro	1893
44	45	✓ (H)	2 (J)	✓	✓ / ✓	R or L	Top	171 x 80 x 73	532	384	148	2	Australia	Electrolux	1499

Nifty extras on some of the very large fridges — the Samsung Cool Tech Plus (left), for example, has temperature readouts for both compartments (and, what's more, they're accurate). These are a great help for keeping your fridge at the appropriate temperatures. It also has a through-the-door chilled water dispenser.

CORRECTION

In our previous fridge test report (November 2002), some models' running costs were incorrectly calculated. On average, these costs were shown as $40 less than they should have been; they're now correct as shown in this table.

† *Models from our latest test.*

* *Measured dimensions include hinges and any protrusions at the back, such as the compressor. They're rounded up to the next centimetre.*

** *Warranty conditions vary; check with the manufacturer.*

*** *Recommended retail prices, as supplied by manufacturers in February/March 2003.*

rev Reversible.

(A) *Available in stainless steel, Ns205H, for $1799.*

(B) *Most F&P fridges come in four price and style ranges: Tasman, Elegance, Inox (brushed stainless steel) and Iridium (stainless steel; fingerprint-resistant); the Inox and Iridium have glass shelves. Only the Tasmans have a reversible door; you need a kit to do it and a service call is recommended.*

(C) *This model has had minor changes since our last test but they shouldn't influence our test results.*

(D) *The Virtuoso models of the Westinghouse fridges have a stainless steel finish and glass shelves.*

(E) *Also available in 'pewter' finish.*

(F) *This model is only available with a stainless steel finish.*

(G) *Available with titanium-coloured front, GR-642AT.*

(H) *With control.*

(J) *One wide, one narrow.*

(K) *Service call recommended.*

1 Overall score

The overall score is based on performance and ease of use, weighted as follows:

- Ease of use: 20%.
- Temperature performance: 40%.
- Energy efficiency: 20%.
- Crisper freshness: 8%.
- Cooling: 12%.

For more information on what these tests include, see the last major fridge test report in CHOICE, November 2002, or go to www.CHOICEextra.com.au.

2 10-year running costs

These are calculated at a rate of 12.5 cents per kWh. A 10-year period provides a useful indication of the long-term differences between high and low energy usage — and you should expect your fridge to last at least that long.

3 Features

Refer to *What to look for*, CHOICE, November 2002, or go to www.CHOICEextra.com.au, for more on these.

recalls&bans

*Nowadays there are so many product recalls we may not be able to print all of them in CHOICE. For comprehensive recall information go to the Federal Treasury website: **www.recalls.gov.au**. If you don't have web access, call the **Consumer Safety Unit** on (02) 6263 2747.*

Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after a recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

THE PRODUCT: ICM and **Burton** have recalled **three-pin plugs**. These plugs may have been purchased on their own or on an appliance, and were manufactured between May 2001 and September 2002. Extension leads with ICM or Burton plugs aren't affected.
The problem: Some plugs may not earth the circuit properly. A risk of shock or fire could arise if the plug is attached to an appliance that has a fault that causes the appliance to become live, and safety switches fail to work properly.
What to do: Disconnect the plug or appliance. Check the plug to see if it has either ICM or Burton on it. If 'ICM' and 'K1-53' are around the outside edge, check if it has Texta marks on two of the pins or a sticker saying "inspected". If it does, there's no need for further action. Only plugs without Texta marks or the sticker are affected by this recall.

If 'Burton' and the letters 'F' and 'B57' are on the plug, check if the date stamp has '02' in the centre and an arrow pointing to 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 or 9 o'clock. If it does, and doesn't have Texta marks on two of the pins or a sticker that says "inspected", it's affected by this recall.

Call 1800 728 890 if your plug is affected to arrange an inspection and test, or for more information.

THE PRODUCT: Arthur Yates & Co has recalled the old formulation of **Yates Rose Gun Black Spot and Insect Killer**, 750 mL. The batches affected have APN numbers 93 10428 107849 (single pack), 93 10428 429255 (twin pack) and 93 10428 429187 (refill pack). The new formulation (identified by a fluorescent pink triangle above the main label) is not affected.
The problem: The concentration of the active ingredient in the product differs from that on the label by more than the prescribed extent. This may affect the product's effectiveness as a fungicide.
What to do: For more information and to obtain a refund, contact Arthur Yates on 1800 136 090, Monday to Friday, 8:30 am to 5 pm EST. Also see CHOICE, December 2002.

THE PRODUCT: Associated Furnishers (Qld) has recalled the **Bonny Bunk Bed**, a double-decker bunk bed made from tubular steel, with a double bed on the bottom and a single bed on the top, sold in the NT and Queensland since late January 2003.
The problem: A jam cleat in the guard rail is a possible snag point for children's clothing, and the spacing between the steps of the ladder is too small.
What to do: Customers should be contacted by phone to arrange rectification work, or for more information call (07) 3274 3262.

THE PRODUCT: La Belle Toys has recalled **My First Puzzle Clock**, item number 203B. It's a green clock with colourful shapes, packed in a blister pack, and sold through discount stores in NSW from July 2001 to December 2002.
The problem: The product doesn't meet the Australian toy standard due to the presence of detachable small parts that pose a choking hazard to young children.
What to do: Don't use it. Store carefully before returning it to the place of purchase for a refund.

THE PRODUCT: La Belle Toys has recalled the **4 Piece Infant Rattle Set**, item number 61085. The blister pack contained four colourful plastic rattles, and was sold through discount stores in NSW from July 2001 to December 2002.
The problem: The product doesn't meet the Australian toy standard due to the presence of detachable small parts that pose a choking hazard to young children.
What to do: Don't use it. Store carefully before returning it to the place of purchase for a refund.

THE PRODUCT: Bostik Findley Australia has recalled **Never-Seez 320 g aerosol cans** of anti-sieze and lubricating compound, manufactured in June 2000.
The problem: If unopened cans have been stored at temperatures over 50°C in the last 2½ years, the cans may fail, and the ends may blow out.
What to do: Don't touch the cans. Call 1800 621 221 immediately to arrange for removal of the product.

THE PRODUCT: Dimmeys Stores has recalled a **cordless security monitor**, a 900 mHz audio-visual monitor that enables the transmission of pictures and sound within a radius of 100 feet. It was sold in Victoria through Dimmeys Stores and Forges of Footscray.
The problem: It causes interference with the mobile telephone network.
What to do: Return it immediately to the place of purchase for a refund, or call (03) 9396 6900 for more information.

THE PRODUCT: The Body Shop has recalled the following **'Hope' decorative tealight candle holders:**

- White Musk silver candle holder, with lilac/clear beads (code 9128).
- Oceanus silver candle holder with aqua/clear beads (code 9129).
- The Spirit of Moonflower silver candle holder with pink/clear beads (code 9164).
- Generic gold candle holder with red/clear beads (code 9162).

They were sold through Body Shop retail outlets, The Body Shop By Mail, Body Shop At Home and The Body Shop On-line, between October 2002 and February 7, 2003.
The problem: The decorative beads are flammable and could ignite.
What to do: Stop using the product. Return it to any outlet of The Body Shop for a refund, or call 1800 003 416, 9 am to 6:30 pm EST for more information.

THE PRODUCT: Richgro Garden Products has recalled **Rogor insecticide**, batch number 260702.
The problem: It contains the herbicide Triclopyr, which is likely to cause unintended damage to plants. In addition, the first aid instructions on the label are incorrect.
What to do: Return it to the place of purchase for a refund or call (08) 9455 1323 for more information.

THE PRODUCT: Elcheikh International has recalled the **Sporty Twin Jogger** stroller, sold between October 2002 and December 2002.
The problem: The stroller may develop a vibration in the front swivel wheel.
What to do: Call (02) 9774 4655 for information about your nearest repair agent.

THE PRODUCT: Denbri Investments has recalled **fashion spectacles** (sunglasses), with identification marks of L570B and L871C, which can be found on the inside of the arms.
The problem: They don't meet the Australian product safety standard.
What to do: Return the sunglasses to PO Box 5425, Bundall 4217, for a refund of product and postage costs. For more information call (07) 5532 2408.

THE PRODUCT: Homeart has recalled the **Magma Lamp**, model SKU 1408. The lamp is fitted with a metal lampholder and was sold through Homeart stores from December 2001 until mid January 2003.
The problem: The lamp doesn't comply with mandatory electrical safety requirements and in some circumstances may cause an electric shock.
What to do: Don't use it. Return it to your nearest Homeart store for a refund, or call 1300 728 811 for more information.

THE PRODUCT: Look Sharp Concepts has recalled **Toy Monkey with Sounds**, a children's plush toy with barcode number 9316292084422, sold in discount stores between December 2002 and February 2003.
The problem: The seams of the monkey may come apart, revealing small beads that pose a choking hazard to a young child.
What to do: Don't use it. Store carefully before returning it to the place of purchase for a refund, or call (02) 9688 1900 for more information.

THE PRODUCT: RJ Wood has recalled the **Toy Romantic Mini Technical Vehicle Team**, which includes a toy friction-powered car, truck and plane, with barcode number 4893334287485, sold in NSW.
The problem: The product doesn't meet the Australian toy standard due to the presence of detachable small parts that pose a choking hazard to young children.
What to do: Don't use it. Store carefully before returning it to the place of purchase for a refund.

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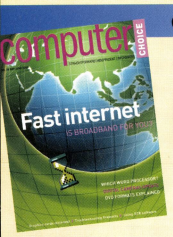

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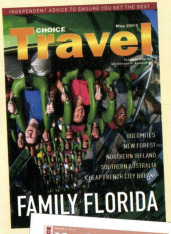

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HOW TO USE THIS INDEX

Bold type indicates a test, survey or trial report, normal type indicates other articles.
*** indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items, letters or recalls. For space reasons, the index generally doesn't include Choice Cuts and other small pieces.**

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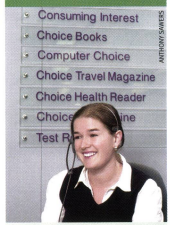
BECOME A FRIEND OF THE CONSUMERS' ASSOCIATION



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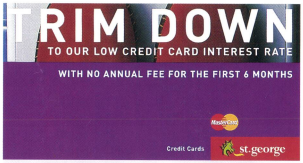
hardword

just Squeezed
FRUIT JUICES
WILD CRANBERRY
JUICE DRINK
mL WITH NO LESS THAN 30% FRUIT JUICE
CONTAINS PRESERVED, RECONSTITUTED CONCENTRATED JUICE, SUGAR, VITAMIN C, SWEETENER, ACIDITY REGULATOR (330), PRESERVATIVE (202).
JUST SQUEEZED FRUIT JUICES PTY. LTD., NSW.
PHONE (02) 9765 9455 FAX (02) 9765 9455

Pull the other one!

'Just Squeezed' imported and reconstituted juice? We don't think so — perhaps it's the consumer and not the fruit they're referring to...



The interest rate isn't the only thing that's been trimmed...

Trust a bank to shorten 'annual' to six months! And remember last month's *Hard Word?* The same bank reduced a dozen to 10...

Electronic socks?

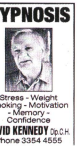
Our reader, A Forrest, wondered whether she'd have to plug them in or use batteries. (And the * didn't solve the mystery: it just meant 'no rainchecks'.)

Women's Bonds electronic socks*
Styles will vary

HOT PRICE
$2.00

THE WESTERNER

INCORPORATING SAMFORD TIMES



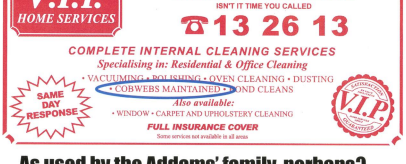
MEET MR VERSATILE...

Or maybe it's the *Westerner (incorporating Samford Times)* that needs a slap on the wrist for mixing up the pictures...

Patrick Secker MP
Federal Member for Barker
37 Adelaide Road, Murray Bridge SA 5253
Phone: 1800 182 328 Fax: (08) 8531 2124
Email: p.secker@aph.gov.au

MONDAY BLUES?

If this MP is using his calendar to plan his Mondays and Thursdays this year, we wish him luck.


V.I.P.
HOME SERVICES
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• COBWEBS MAINTAINED • BOND CLEANS
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• WINDOW • CARPET AND UPHOLSTERY CLEANING
FULL INSURANCE COVER
Some services not available in all areas
SAME DAY RESPONSE
V.I.P.

As used by the Addams' family, perhaps?

HOW ABOUT A LITTLE HELP?

The *Hard Word* would like to thank all the readers who've responded with examples of outrageous ads, promotions and products. Thanks to L Abbott, L Oakford, T Burgess, A Forrest and S Pope for their contributions to this month's *Hard Word*. Please keep them coming.

If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to *The Hard Word*, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, or email your suggestions to thehardword@choice.com.au

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